

S E R M O N S

O N

SEVERAL OCCASIONS.

S E R M O N S

ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS

PREACHED BY
S E R M O N S
WESTMINSTER ABBEY

A.D.
1704

ST. MARGARET'S WESTMINSTER

SEVERAL OCCASIONS
PREACHED BY
ST. MARGARET'S WESTMINSTER



THE MASTER OF WESTMINSTER SCHOOL

L O N D O N

PRINTED FOR THE AUTHOR

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MDCCLXV

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S E R M O N S

ON

SEVERAL OCCASIONS,

PREACHED IN

WESTMINSTER-ABBNEY,

AND

ST. MARGARET'S, WESTMINSTER.

BY

PEIRSON LLOYD, M. A. K

SECOND MASTER OF WESTMINSTER-SCHOOL.

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Preached in Lambeth chapel, Dec. 28, 1761,

at the consecration of the Right Reverend

Father in God, JOHN, Lord Bishop of Lin-

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shall always most thankfully acknowledge.

He further hopes, that whoever shall give
himself the trouble to read these slight dis-

courses, will remember, that they were drawn
up in little broken intervals from the business

of a publick school, a due attention to which
he has experienced, for these forty years, to

be of itself a full and sufficient employment.

E R R A T A.

Page 17. line 13. for *heart*, read *health*; p. 29. l. 3. for *appointments*, r. *appointment*; p. 64. l. 8. for *next*, r. *present*; p. 74. l. 8. for *enlarge*, r. *enlarged*; p. 103. l. 11. after *them*, add *but*; p. 117. l. 7. for *fitteth*, r. *filleteth*; p. 119. l. 4, 5, r. *magnitude*; ditto, l. 9. for *wormanship*, r. *workmanship*; ditto, l. 19. for *wole*, r. *whole*; p. 129. l. 8. after *only*, for *now*, r. *how*; p. 132. l. 19. for *apparantly*, r. *apparently*; ditto, l. 23. for *forget*, r. *forgat*; p. 133. l. 8. for *now*, r. *more*; p. 143. l. 13. for *would*, r. *could*; p. 148. l. 17. for *we*, r. *are*; p. 168. l. 5. for *sin*, r. *sinner*; p. 180. l. 1. a comma after *condemned*; p. 202. l. 16. for *articles*, r. *artifices*; p. 203. l. 17. dele *is*; p. 204. l. 11. for *band*, r. *fund*; p. 235. l. 14. for *those*, r. *these*; p. 256. l. 2. for *of*, r. *on*; p. 264. l. 11. for *general*, r. *generous*.

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S E R M O N I.

PHIL. iv. 4.

*Rejoice in the Lord always, and again I say
rejoice.*

A Desire after happiness is the ruling principle of all our actions. Various may be our opinions about it, and different the methods we take to pursue it, yet still happiness is what by all is universally aimed at. I need not observe to you, that no man can make any thing the object of happiness, but as it is, or at least seems to be, good. Now, whatever good we apprehend, we cannot but receive a satisfaction from it; and this satisfaction arising from the apprehension of any good, is properly joy. According then as the good is, in proportion will be the joy resulting from it.

B

If

If then we would have our joy compleat, if we would be entirely happy, we ought carefully to learn and pursue, what is our greatest good. Now that is the supreme good of any being, which exalts its nature to the highest perfection it is capable of. Accordingly, as man is compounded of soul and body, in the one resembling the nature of angels, and in some measure allied even to the Deity itself; in the other but little superior to the brute beasts that perish; that certainly, which advances the most excellent part of him, namely, his soul, that, I say, must be his supreme good, that should be the object of all his desires, and that is God: He is the spring of joy that can never be dried up; he can refresh us under all the fatigues and troubles that can befall us; raise and support us under the greatest oppressions, and revive us even at the point of death. We may, we ought *to rejoice in the Lord always.*

This duty the Apostle is recommending to the Philippians when grievously persecuted
upon

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upon the account of their religion; a duty certainly never more seasonable, were it at the same time but as practicable. But where can there be room for joy, when we are encompassed on all sides with sorrows? Can we, while we feel an affliction pressing heavy upon us, can we be easy under it? Nay, what is much more, can we even rejoice while we feel it? This seems at first a very strange paradox, and what most men, from experience, are apt to cry out against. But how strange soever it may seem, how contradictory soever it may be to the common apprehensions of mankind, it will, upon mature consideration, be found not only possible, but highly reasonable. And indeed we might rest assured, that to *rejoice in the Lord*, even in the most trying circumstances, might be done, for this plain reason, because God has made it our duty to do so. The Apostle was not ignorant what people would be ready to urge in this case; and therefore, when he had said, *rejoice in the Lord always*, to show that

he foresaw the objection, and, at the same time, the weakness of it, with an authority sufficient to silence the most obstinate gainsayer, he enforces it with this emphatical repetition, *and again I say rejoice*; as much as as to say, do ye alledge the greatness of your sufferings in excuse for not performing this duty? Consider, and you will find that itself is the strongest argument in the world for the necessity of it. Consider the occasion of these sufferings, the credit they may procure our new religion in the world, and the advantage the world may reap thereby; consider, that God, who hath appointed them, how able to deliver you out of them, to support you under them, and in an infinite manner to reward you for them; consider this, and you cannot but acknowledge the *reasonableness* of it.

In discoursing of this text, I shall take the following method:

I. I shall show the nature of the joy here mentioned.

II. The

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II. The reasonableness of it, and our perpetual obligations to it.

III. I shall prove, that nothing but God can be the object of this joy. And,

IV. That none but the religious man can be capable of it.

First, then, for the nature of the joy here mentioned.

I have already showed what joy is in general, namely, a satisfaction arising from the apprehension of some good. I showed also, that the greatest good our natures are capable of, is the enjoyment of God. But as the greatest good is no otherwise a good to us, than as we find ourselves concerned in it, in order to *rejoice in the Lord*, we must first know what he is in himself, and then, what in respect to us.

Now God in himself is a most pure and eternal Being, of infinite knowledge, almighty power, indefectible holiness, and all other possible perfections.

In respect to us, as he alone is eternal, we must all have received our beings from, and be entirely dependent upon, him. As he is infinitely wise, he must have made us to some end; and what can that end be, but our happiness, and his glory? As he is just, he cannot but approve of the devout worshipper; as he is powerful, he cannot but be able, as he is good, he cannot but be willing, to protect and defend him; as he is the omnipresent sovereign of the universe, nothing can be done without his knowledge, nothing without his permission. If therefore afflictions fall to the good man's share in this world, it is plain God must design him for another; it being contrary to his nature either to let wickedness go off unpunished, or virtue unrewarded.

To *rejoice*, therefore, *in the Lord*, is to be entirely satisfied with whatever befalls us, as his appointment. It is to consider, that he is our God; and that, whether we drink the cup of prosperity, or the dregs of adversity,

we are still serving his righteous purposes in both: It is to be assured of his wisdom and goodness to know and dispose of us better than we can ourselves: It is to receive his favours with thankfulness, and his chastisements with patience: In short, it is to have an entire confidence in him, that, if we will but obey him to our utmost here, he will make us for ever happy with him hereafter.

II. I come now, in the second place, to show the reasonableness of this joy, and our perpetual obligations to it. Now both these do, indeed, pretty evidently appear from what has been already said; but I shall now offer some farther arguments in proof of them.

While God is felt only in his mercies, to rejoice in him seems a duty readily enough to be acknowledged by most men; though it is to be feared but few practise it, even then, as they ought; they are too apt, while they receive the blessing, to forget the hand by which it is conveyed, and the uses for

which it is designed. And this is the true reason, why this world's advantages bring such little contentment with them as they generally do. The only difficulty is, how it can be practised when we are beset with affliction; for unless it be practicable, it can never be looked upon as a duty. Now to clear this, let it be considered, in the first place,

1. That afflictions are not always the marks of God's displeasure. God may be as much our father in his corrections, as in the mildest dispensations of his mercy. What the world calls misfortunes may be sent only as so many trials of our faith and obedience in this life, in order to our greater reward of glory in the next. They may be meant to distinguish the peculiar favourites of heaven, by showing, that though *all the powers of darkness* be combined against them, yet they have a soul within that can support them under, nay, that can triumph over them. How many noble virtues are there, which can never shine forth but in the day of adversity? The diamond

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9,

mond appears not with that genuine lustre, as in the dark; nor the truly great man, as through a cloud of calamity and distress. And surely the satisfaction of acquitting ourselves handsomely to God and our consciences at such a time, is a joy far surpassing the greatest pleasures the most prosperous profligate can boast of. How many worthies are there recorded in holy writ, who bore the sharpest extremities with such an invincible courage, such an amazing unconcernedness, nay, with such eagerness and transport, that we cannot think of them without admiration!

2. In the next place, let us consider that afflictions are not properly evils in themselves, but may be so circumstantiated, as to come under the notion of good; and, consequently, be matter of joy and comfort. The enduring of a lesser pain, to avoid a greater, and the foregoing a present pleasure, for the sake of a future more substantial one, is what is approved of by reason, and confirmed by the
prac-

practice of all mankind. Who would not voluntarily put a check to his appetites, to preserve his health? and part with one limb, rather than endanger his whole body? The soldier will cheerfully undergo laborious marches and sleepless nights, to take the advantage of his enemy, or prevent his enemy taking the advantage of him. The merchant readily leaves his friends and his country, and risks his fortune and his life, upon the probable expectation of a profitable voyage, and a safe return.

If we try this way of reasoning in respect to our concerns in the other world, we shall find that all the miseries and torments that the wittiest malice and greatest power upon earth can inflict upon us, are such trifles, such mere nothings, in comparison of the reward we shall receive from our bearing them as becomes us, that so far from declining them, in a good cause, and upon a proper occasion, that we ought rather to court and embrace them. Time itself bears no proportion to
eter-

eternity; what then is this life of ours, that we should not, with joy, part with it in its best circumstances, and endure it in its worst, upon a probability, it is our own faults, if I may not say a certainty, that we shall soon arrive at that better life, where there is fulness of joy, and pleasures at God's right hand for evermore?

3. In the third place, let it be considered, that afflictions affect chiefly the outward man. The soul, during its abode with the body, cannot indeed be entirely abstracted from it, nor be utterly insensible to its sufferings; yet will it never be dejected by them, nor sink under them. No, *the spirit of a man, unless wounded itself by sin, will sustain his infirmities.* This body indeed is liable to innumerable accidents from without, as well as in its own nature subject to decays, death, and dissolution; but the soul is immortal, and conscious of its immortality. No persecution can reach this, nor hinder it from fixing its confidence upon God; and where God is
the

the object of confidence, there the natural result must be joy.

4. Hitherto then we see no reason but that this duty *may* be of perpetual obligation. Now if we consider, in the fourth place, that God is immutable; we shall be convinced that it *must*. And it must be owned, the duty could not perpetually hold, unless God were perpetually the same; for, where the cause ceases, the effect, of course, must cease with it. As therefore all our joy arises from a sense of having an interest in God, we can rejoice in him no longer than we think that interest sure. But if he is immutable, if we once enjoy his favour, we may be satisfied we ever shall, unless we forfeit it by our own mismanagement. Now, that God is immutable, is thus plainly proved: All change must either be voluntary, or involuntary; but as God is all-powerful, he can never change against his will; and it can never be his will to change, because, as all-perfect, he cannot change for the better, as all-

all-wise, he will never change for the worse. Here then is our confidence, that if he is at any time the object of joy, he must be always so, as being always the same. He can as soon cease to be at all, as cease to be true and just; as long then as we faithfully discharge our duty towards him, we have his word to assure us, that he will be our friend; and if he be our friend, the enmity of the whole world is scarce worth the regarding.

III. I come now, in the third place, to show, that nothing but God can be the object of the joy mentioned in the text; and it having been already proved, that God himself could not be so, were he not immutable, it necessarily follows, that nothing else can be, since there is nothing besides him that is so. But the truth of this will yet farther appear, from a consideration,

First, Of this world; and,

Secondly, Of the nature of the soul.

First, then, for this world. Take the whole compass of nature, examine the heavens
and

and the earth, and you will find nothing but continual changes; and yet, with all these changes, nothing new; the same things returning over and over again in a circle: Fair or foul weather, a calm or a storm, a moderate or excessive degree of heat or cold, as it happens. Consider man, at the same time, affected with each variation. The rains may refresh or overwhelm his grounds; the winds favour or blast his designs; the sun arise with healing in his wings, or scatter the plague and the pestilence. This may serve to show how unable the world in general is to afford this substantial and lasting joy I am speaking of. I shall now descend to those particulars which men usually build their happiness upon; and those are chiefly these three, greatness, riches, and pleasure.

I. First for greatness. The ambitious man thinks he can never be happy, unless he is great; and then only will he think himself so, when he sees none greater than himself, which 'tis impossible he should ever do; it
is

is therefore impossible he should ever be happy. Ambition is founded upon the consciousness of our own meanness; and when this is the principle that animates our desires, envy, injustice, and cruelty will be the instruments to obtain them. We can never be impatient to get above others, till we first envy them their height; and then we seldom want injustice enough to bring them any-how upon a level with us, and afterwards cruelty enough to trample them under us. And yet these very means are generally destructive of the end they are designed to effect: For he who envies others, will be envied by others; and he that is industrious to pull others down, will find others as industrious to pull him down. But suppose him, for once, arrived at the utmost pitch of human greatness, alas! how dangerous is the pinnacle he stands upon! Is this worth all the care and trouble he has been at in attaining it? And feels he not still more care and trouble from the dread of being dispossessed of it? Besides, what a great-

greatness is this, that is founded only upon a comparison between himself and others but a small remove below him? Would he think as he ought, he would find himself little indeed in comparison of those many beings at such a vastly greater distance above him.

2. For riches. Does a man place his happiness in wealth; what sum is sufficient for the purpose? To this no answer can be given; for if his happiness consists in it, he never can have too much; and while there is more to be had, he never can have enough. Where is that covetous man, that is not an instance of the truth I am asserting? So that, abating the anxiety in getting, the care in keeping, and the fear of losing, let him have amassed together as much as is possible, and he will still be as far to seek for happiness as ever. Does it at all prevent the inroad of pains and diseases? Can it cure a festered limb, or a broken constitution? Can it give ease and comfort to him under any affliction? Nay, rather

rather does it not add a sting to it, and make it tenfold more tormenting?

3. Then as for pleasure, that of the body I mean, if it deserves the name of pleasure, what drudgery is there in the pursuit of it! what emptiness in the enjoyment! what shame in the consequence! What delight can the most sumptuous entertainment afford us, before our appetites are craving, or after they are satisfied? Every morsel we eat, or cup we drink, more than our nature requires, is but nauseous to our stomach, and destructive to our heart. Nor do the fumes of excess more impair the body, than obscure and weaken the understanding. How often does luxury give a man up as a prey to death, before death is ready to receive him! so that the epicure sometimes outlives the use of his reason and his limbs, and remains for years after, as it were, a monument to himself.

As to the lewd libertine, I shall say no more of him than this, that if a blasted reputation, a diseased body, and a wounded soul,

be pleasures, he may, perhaps, lay as fair a claim to happiness as any one living.

But we need no other argument against the insufficiency of all worldly enjoyments to make us happy, than this one, that they give no satisfaction to the principal part of us, namely, our soul; a survey of which will furnish us with a *second* convincing proof, that nothing but God can be the object of the joy here discoursed of.

The soul of man is the image of God impress'd upon him. This, though united to the body, is, in its nature and operations, entirely different from it, and vastly superior to it. This is not confined to place or time, as that is. It can cast its view back into past ages, or forward into futurity, and make both as it were present to it. This, as it is immortal, is infinite too, though not in its comprehension, yet in its desires. It is not content with the narrow circle of this globe, but extends its views much wider, even to the utmost compass of nature; nor will it ever stop,

stop, till it comes to the God of nature. It is of a capacity too big for the whole world to fill it; nothing but what is infinite and eternal can do it; and nothing is so but God.

IV. I come now, in the fourth and last place, to show, that none but the religious man can be capable of this joy.

As for the sinner, how should he rejoice in the Lord, who endeavours to secure no interest in him, lives in open defiance of him? Is God in his nature immutable? then cannot mercy itself save him from the wrath of offended justice. And how dreadful must the event be, when infinite justice condemns, and omnipotence executes! And yet, that this is the natural consequence of sin, every sinner must be assured of from the conviction of his own conscience. This is ever and anon checking him in the full career of his lusts and inclinations, and perpetually awakening him with the terrible alarm of death and judgment. This will not be awed down by greatness, nor bought over by riches, nor allured

into any sinful compliance by pleasure. No, but it will make him miserable in the midst of his grandeur, poor in the midst of his abundance, and unhappy midst all his enjoyments. As I before observed, that afflictions are no marks of God's displeasure to a good man, and may be even considered under the notion of good; so, to the sinner, God often sends prosperity in his anger, and turns his very blessings into a curse. And wretched indeed must that man be, who can have no joy in God, nor in any thing beside him.

But as for the godly, it is not so with him; the consideration of every divine attribute brings him a fresh supply of comfort. He may, with confidence, say. Is God allmighty? then can he defend me from my most dangerous enemies. Is he merciful? then shall all my frailties be forgiven. Is he faithful? then shall all my virtues be rewarded. Is he eternal? then I *may* be for ever happy in the enjoyment of him. Is he immutable? then it is impossible but I *must* be so. And, surely, had

had he no interest at all in this life, were he to meet with nothing but distress and anguish here; yet, as he is to rise to a life infinitely and eternally happy after this, this consideration alone were sufficient to make him rejoice, with St. Paul, in tribulation; and, with Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith, endure the cross, and despise the shame.

But the case, thanks be to God, is quite otherwise. Christianity does not expose us to persecution, as it did the first professors of it. It neither debars us of the pleasures, the profits, or the honours of this world: It only hinders us from pursuing them too eagerly, and misapplying them to wrong purposes: It only frees us from those cares that would otherwise eat out the enjoyment of them: It only makes them subject to us, instead of making us subject to them: In short, it only keeps sense, as it ought to be, under the dominion of reason, and bids us so to provide for the good of the body, as not to

endanger the ruin both of that and the soul too.

Observe the good man in his pleasures, and you will always find him easy, cheerful, and innocent; in his meals, refreshing nature, but not oppressing it; in his exercises, promoting his health, but not impairing it; in his recreations, relaxing the mind, but not unnerving it; in his appetites quick, and his understanding clear.

In a prosperous condition, see him filling up the wants of those about him out of his own abundance. His riches are a blessing to others as well as himself. He is not tormented with the sense of having got them unjustly, nor is he solicitous how to hoard them up securely; his only concern is how to lay them out most profitably; not in the common methods of usury and extortion; not for his own private benefit, but for the good of others; yet sure I might say for his own, his greatest benefit, since he thereby

purchaseth the hearts and prayers of the poor
and the consciousness of God's favour for
evermore; and in his heart he saith

Behold him invested with honour, and he
addeth lustre even to dignity itself. Authority
is truly and only honourable in him. He maketh
use of it to the noblest purposes, the sup-
pression of vice, and the maintenance of vir-
tue. In imitation of God, he is a Father of
the fatherless, and defendeth the cause of the
widow. He rescues the injured from the
power of the oppressor, and the poor from
him that is too strong for him. He is,
with Job, eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame.
He has all the advantages of greatness, with-
out the danger of it, and that, because his
goodness, in a great measure, prevents envy,
which is the cause of it. His life is a public
blessing; his death a public loss.

Observe him in afflictions; how calm and
resigned he looks upon them all in this
comfortable view, either as means to prevent
some sin, or to exercise some virtue. Is he

affected with what is apt to strike deep into human nature, even the loss of an only child? he thus reflects with himself; might not my fondness for him have drawn off my affections from God? This, perhaps, God foresaw; and may therefore, by this merciful severity, at once have saved both the child and the parent. Is he injured in his reputation? he knows, that truth will shortly come to light, to the glory of innocence, and the confusion of calumny and falshood. However, though he be condemned in all the courts of this world, he has still the court of heaven to appeal to, where he is conscious he must be acquitted. Is he spoiled of his goods? he parts with them without any murmur against Providence, nay, even adoring and praising it at the same time, *The Lord gave, and the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord.* In pains or in sickness he is still the same; he feels the hand of God in both; he therefore submits, and is content.

Observe

Observe him, lastly, at the point of death, that dreadful time, when all other comforts fail; yet, to the godly, there ariseth up light in the darkness. The blessings of heaven, as they have accompanied him through all the other parts of his life, do not forsake him in this; they are now in a more eminent and plentiful manner afforded him for the support of his soul, under the ruins of his body. Life is opened to him in the midst of death. He looks through the gloom, and sees his Saviour standing ready to receive him: He longs to be with him, and waits but the summons: Suddenly the summons is given; he dies, and is happy.

I have time but just to draw this general inference from the whole, namely, the necessity, as well as the advantage, of being religious: For if God, and God only, is able to make us happy, we ought to make him the only object of our happiness; and that he never can be, till we are conformed to his likeness. Let us then carefully learn his

his will, and faithfully perform it. Let us study, above all things, to please him; and fear, above all things, to offend him. Let us consider him under those gracious characters of our Creator, Preserver, Sanctifier, and Redeemer; and let these considerations produce suitable effects in our lives and practice. In short, let us, with a well-grounded hope, rejoice in God here; so shall we be forever happy in the enjoyment of him hereafter.

Which that we may all be, God of his infinite mercy grant, though the merits of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God be ascribed all honour and glory, world without end. Amen.

are so frequently met with in the word, and according to this sense of the word, are those passages of scripture to be understood, wherein the body is bid to count it all joy, when it fall into divers temptations, and wherein temptations are mentioned to have come from God himself, as when it is said,

God

his will, and faithfully performeth his duty above all things, to please him; and
S E R M O N II.
 consider him under those gracious characters
 of our Creator, Preserver, and
*God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be
 tempted above that you are able, but will with
 the temptation also make a way to escape, that
 ye may be able to bear it.*

THE Greek word which we translate *tempt*,
 is in its original signification, no more than to
 try; according to which, any thing that tends
 to try the heart of man, be it in what respect
 soever, may be called a *temptation*. It is thus
 that the outward crosses and calamities of life
 are so frequently met with under that name;
 and according to this sense of the word are
 those passages of Scripture to be understood,
 wherein the godly are bid to count it all joy
 when they fall into divers *temptations*, and
 wherein *temptations* are mentioned to have
 come from God himself; as when it is said,
 God

God *tempted* Abraham, and the like. But whatever the words to *tempt*, or *temptation*, might originally mean, it is certain that they generally have a bad idea annexed to them; so that, by a *temptation*, we naturally conceive such a trial, as is apt to prejudice a man in his spiritual interest; and to *tempt*, commonly implies in it an endeavour to supplant the soul, by seducing it to sin; and from this sense of the words it is, that the devil is so peculiarly and emphatically called the *Tempter*; in opposition to which, the Scriptures affirm, that *God doth not, cannot tempt any man.*

It is farther observable, that the same thing may be differently called, according to its different respects, namely, a *trial* in one respect, a *temptation* in the other. As far as God is concerned in it, so far is it properly a *trial* only, being designed by him as the means of manifesting our virtue, in order to our receiving the reward of it; but with regard to the corruption of our hearts, and the abuse that is likely to be made of it, it may
very

very fitly be called a *temptation* also, and a snare. For instance: Prosperity and adversity, with reference to God's appointments of them, are intended for the good of the soul; the one as agreeable food, the other as a wholesome medicine; and yet nothing, through the craft of the tempter, more likely to prove destructive to the soul than these, the one as a sweet, the other as a bitter poison.

And indeed it is a melancholy consideration, that there is hardly that temporal blessing which God can bestow, but what, through the frailty of our nature, the corruption of the world, and the indefatigable industry of the great enemy of souls, whom the Scriptures represent like a roaring lion, walking about, and seeking whom he may devour; I say, there is hardly that blessing but what *may*, and without our utmost caution, *will*, end in a curse. And if these indulgences of heaven are likely to meet with such a return, what are to be expected from the severer disciplines of Providence? It is natural to think,
that

that if men are apt to be ungrateful under the former, they will be apt too to be impatient under the latter; as to forget God in the one, so to murmur against him for the other. However, let us not be dismayed; temptations, though great, are yet not irresistible; by the grace of God we may still overcome them; nay, we may so far over-rule the designs of satan against us, as to make him become the unwilling instrument of our good; we may be safe under God's protection, unless we forfeit it by our own mismanagement; for God is faithful; who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

From which words, I shall take occasion to show,

First, The necessity of temptations; that they are unavoidable;

Secondly, That however unavoidable they are, they are yet not irresistible,

Third-

Third-

Thirdly, That they are not irresistible, entirely owing to God's grace and assistance.

And,

Fourthly, How far that grace and assistance are to be expected.

First then, I am to show the necessity of temptations; that they are unavoidable; and this will appear, both from the nature of man, and of this life, as a state of probation for another. As to the first then,

Reason is the distinguishing characteristic of man, and what properly constitutes him a moral agent; it is by this that he is capable of choosing or refusing, doing or forbearing whatever shall seem best to him. Accordingly God deals not with him as with the material world, which moves necessarily and mechanically; nor yet as with the animal, which is carried on by a blind, though unerring, instinct; but lays good and evil, life and death, before him, leaving the choice of either entirely to his own determination. And were there not these different motives proposed

posed to him, to what end were his reason given, or wherein could his liberty be shown? Take away his inducements to vice, and you take away all opportunities of displaying his virtue; for there can be no virtue where there is no opposition; and the greater the opposition is, the greater still is the virtue that surmounts it.

Temptations are still farther necessary to distinguish good and bad men here, and to proportion their rewards and punishments hereafter. I hope there is no one who hears me, so much a stranger to Scripture, as not to know we are now only in a state of probation, in order to a future recompense; and that according as we live virtuously or wickedly in this life, we shall be happy or miserable in the next.

Now as to the distinguishing of men one from the other, I believe it will be granted, that men differ as much in their tempers, as in their constitutions, their features, or their complexions, and consequently the temptations

tions must be as various as the tempers are to which they are applied ; indeed they would otherwise be hardly temptations at all. For instance ; there are those who will bear the extremity of pain with the resolution of martyrs, who will yet yield to any pleasure that presents itself with the most abject cowardice. On the contrary, there are those whom sensual pleasures have no influence upon ; yet so little able to endure pain, as to be ready to sacrifice their very conscience for their ease. Grandeur would be no allurement to a covetous man, nor riches to an ambitious one ; that only can be properly a temptation to each, which is suitable to the different temper of each. And this is the way whereby God unmasks those that have been long hid from the world, and perhaps from themselves too : this is the method by which he distinguishes between constitution and virtue ; between the form of godliness and the power of it. It is thus that the truly pious are manifested, by appearing in all circumstances, and upon all

D

events,

events, the same; while others, that fall off upon any trial, show, that what was took for their piety, was little better than their temper; and that they sinned not before, merely because they were not properly tempted before.

So that you see temptations are necessary, both from the nature of man, as a free and accountable creature, and from the nature of this world, as a state of probation. Wherefore I shall proceed now, in the *second* place, to show, that temptations, however unavoidable, are yet not irresistible; and the same arguments that prove the one, will prove the other also.

For if the liberty over our actions can appear no otherwise than by temptations, no more can it, unless they may be resisted; for the conclusion is unavoidable; either temptations may be resisted, or man cannot be free. Besides the very end of them, at this rate, must be defeated; now than, as hath been observed, is to distinguish good and bad men here, in order to adjust their happiness

or misery hereafter. But, according to this supposition, no such distinction can be made; for men are either good or bad, not by choice, but by necessity; that is, neither good nor bad in any moral sense of the words at all.

But, that temptations are not irresistible, will appear farther, from God's nature and his word.

Now the very first notions we conceive of God is, that He is an infinitely holy, just, and good Being. But if you say, God has placed men in a world of temptations to sin, that are unavoidable, and yet irresistible, what is this but to make him the author of sin? and so, where is his holiness? If you say, he has required our obedience, where our obedience is impossible, as in case of irresistible temptations it must be, and yet will punish our disobedience, where then is his justice? Again, if you suppose him to have made man, knowing before that he would meet with temptations which he could not resist; and yet resolved to punish him, if he did not resist them,

what is this but to make him delight in the misery of his creatures? And so where is his goodness? who have endured
 But this supposition is not more contradictory to the nature of God, than to the express words of Scripture. Thus in St. Peter, *The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations,* 2 Pet. ii. 9. In St. Paul, *His grace is sufficient for us,* 2 Cor. xiii. 9. And in St. James, *Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life,* Jam. i. 12. Which words plainly show, that temptations may be endured, the enduring them could not otherwise be made the condition of our receiving the crown of life. The promise of the reward, if we conquer them, must necessarily imply that it is in our power to conquer them. And, lastly, in the words of my text, *God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.* Nor do the Scriptures only

only assure us, that temptations may be endured, but furnish us besides with many examples of those, who have endured them. Could afflictions, either severer in themselves, or attended with more aggravating circumstances, befall any man, than what befall Job, and yet had they no other effect upon him, than the winds have upon a strong oak, which, at the same time that they tear off its branches, or shake perhaps its trunk, serve but to fix its root so much the deeper. It was thus, when he saw himself stripped of all the comforts of this life, that he held the faster to that, which was able to support him in the want of them all, and which therefore was more than worth them all, his confidence in the Almighty.

VI. Moses met with temptations of another kind indeed, but of a nature no less dangerous than these. He was bred up in the court of Pharaoh, remarkable for every thing that was bad; and yet, in spite of the king's influence and example, and the servile compliance of the whole court; in spite of luxury,

splendour, and magnificence; in short, of every thing that could recommend or encourage vice, he had the resolution to keep his virtue entire; alone untainted, while all were infected about him.

To name but one instance more: David had been long persecuted, and even his life attempted, by the merciless rage of Saul; when behold this very Saul, on a sudden, entirely in his power; so that he might, at one blow, rid himself of his enemy, and procure himself a crown; gratify his revenge and ambition at the same time. But though Saul had been cruel, David scorns to be revengeful; and generously disdains to wear a crown, till he has a better title than his ambition to show for it.

It were easy to multiply more instances; but I hope it already appears, both from *reason* and *Scripture*, that temptations may be resisted; and from *example*, that they have been. Wherefore I shall now proceed, under my *third* general head, to show, that they are resist-

resistible, is entirely owing to God's grace and assistance.

That there is a general corruption in our nature, I need no better argument to prove, than every man's own experience. This the very best of men feel; and they are the most ready to own and deplore it. And this corruption, which, like a conspirator, is always ready to betray us from within, hath a constant correspondence with numberless temptations constantly attacking us from without, and all these under the management of a most subtle and powerful enemy, who well knows where our weakness lies, and accordingly assaults us there most, where we are least able to defend ourselves. Thus, as the passions have the most prevailing influence over men, he generally takes his advantage first from them; still levelling his attacks against particular persons, from those particular passions which they are each of them most subject to. He hath his offers of gain for the covetous; of applause for the vain; and of honour for

the ambitious: He seduces one man by his fear, and another by his confidence: He shall scare this man from his duty, by multiplying the difficulties of it, and allure that man into sin, by magnifying the enjoyments of it. Nay, he is so subtle, as, without our utmost caution, to turn our very virtues into vices. Thus shall he make frugality serve as a cloak for avarice, and liberality for profuseness; turn moderation, in religious matters, into a cold indifference about them, and transport zeal into enthusiasm: In short, be our age, our temper, or circumstances, what they will, he hath his peculiar temptations for them all. He is ready to meet us at all times, and in all places; in our business, and in our pleasures; abroad and at home; in the most public assemblies, and in our most private retirements. And now, after this short survey of our enemy's strength, and our own weakness, it surely must appear, that we have need of some other help than our own to preserve us; and that can be nothing else than the
grace

grace of God, which, the Scripture tells us, is sufficient for us; for *that his strength is made perfect in weakness.* 2 Cor. xii. 9. So that, be our temptations ever so many, or great, yet greater is *He that is in us, than he that is in the world,* 1 John iv. 4. God is faithful, who will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able, but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

There remains but one thing more to be enquired into; and that is, *fourthly,* How far God's grace is to be expected; and that is only in proportion as we use our own endeavours. The text plainly enough asserts, that we *may* escape, but not absolutely that we *must.* God promises such a supply of power, as may enable us to stand our ground; but leaves it to ourselves, whether we will exert that power, or not. We are not to imagine, that the Divine Grace is to act upon us as a charm, and preserve us against temptations whether we will or no; that is contrary

trary to our nature, and to all the principles of reason and choice; for whether we were under the influence of irresistible temptations, or irresistible grace, the consequence were the same; there could either way be no liberty; no virtue or vice; no title to reward or punishment. Indeed there could then be no such thing as a temptation; for trials, which we either cannot resist, or cannot but overcome, are, properly, no trials at all. In short, God deals with us as free and accountable creatures; requiring from us a right use of those powers we have; and, upon that condition only, supplying us with those we want. He will give us such a measure of his grace, as shall make our endeavours effectual; but not such as shall be effectual without them. He offers us a sufficient assistance, and therein is his mercy; we ourselves are to apply it, and therein is our freedom.

And from hence we may easily learn in what cases we have no right to expect God's

assist-

assistance, and in what we may reasonably depend upon it.

Now if we throw ourselves unnecessarily upon such circumstances as naturally lead to sin, it is not to be expected that God shall prevent the ill consequences of them. For instance: Is a man addicted to licentiousness? let him avoid such places and company as are apt to tempt him into it; otherwise, if he ventures upon them, he is actually resisting God's grace; and that can never be the way, sure, to obtain God's grace to resist the temptation. Is another hasty and choleric? let him carefully shun all occasions that may irritate and inflame him; otherwise it is but reasonable to suppose that God will leave him to himself; and if he will needs meet his enemy upon such unequal terms, he must not wonder at any ill consequences that follow. Above all things, we should be cautious how we needlessly engage ourselves in such a course of life, as, from our constitution and complexion, we know must lay temptations before us; for
miracles

miracles are no more to be expected in the moral world, than in the natural. If we knowingly venture into a house that has the plague, we must expect to be infected; if we needlessly run ourselves into temptations, we must expect to sin. God intended his grace to prosper, not to supersede, our endeavours; to supply our wants, and not our neglects.

On the contrary, be our callings, our conditions, or circumstances what they will, let them be such only as Providence has made necessary, and Providence will make them beneficial too; and whatever temptations naturally meet us in our way, God will, if we be not first wanting to ourselves, support us under them; in his due time deliver us out of them; and, at last, infinitely reward us for them.

The uses of this doctrine are many and obvious. To name some few of them——

Can any thing be more effectual than this, to prevent us from being envious at other
mens

mens conditions, or uneasy in our own. For in this, all mankind are upon a level, that we are all candidates for happiness alike, and must alike expect to meet with temptations in our way to it. God only knows what temptations we are most able to bear, and it is for him therefore to proportion our circumstances accordingly. Let no man therefore covet either the riches or greatness of another to himself; since perhaps his poverty may be his best security, and Providence may have therefore placed him low, in order to keep him safe.

Again, can any thing be a greater comfort to us, under all the difficulties and calamities of life, than to consider, that they are but as trials, which may be endured; and which, if endured, are sure to be rewarded? *Blessed is the man that endureth temptations; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him, James i. v. 12.* And what he hath promised, shall he not fulfil?

Heaven

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but his word shall not pass away. So that be our enemies ever so subtle to deceive, or powerful to hurt us; be ourselves, on the contrary, ever so ignorant to foresee dangers, or weak to resist them; yet may we depend upon Infinite Wisdom to guide us, and Almighty Power to protect us.

By way of caution, lastly, and to conclude: From hence are we clearly taught how to depend on God's aid, so as certainly not to fail of it, and that is, to expect it only on such terms as he hath promised it, namely, in a way suitable to our nature, and in concurrence with our endeavours. Our utmost care, and God's grace, are to go hand in hand in our salvation; *our care*, as absolutely necessary; though it is from God's *grace* only that it can prove effectual. These God hath joined together; and what God hath joined together, let no man, as he values his soul, ever presume to put asunder.

S E R M O N III.

P R O V. iv. 23.

*Keep thy heart with all diligence, for out of it
are the issues of life.*

By the heart, is manifestly meant here, the soul or mind of man; that thinking principle which so eminently distinguishes him from the rest of the creation; and as such, it takes in the understanding, the will, and the passions, with all the several powers and operations of each. This is properly the spring that gives motion to them all. It is this that directs and governs the whole man; all his thoughts, words, and actions are originally derived from this; and into this are they all ultimately to be resolved.

And this principle is of an active nature, that will, and must, exert itself one way or other, either in the projecting of good or evil.

evil. It is free to either ; but it must determine itself to one ; and upon this freedom of choice it is, that man becomes a moral agent, capable of being governed by laws, and consequently of reward, if he observes them ; and of punishment, if he transgresses them ; and accordingly God has given us laws, with the sanctions of eternal happiness and misery annexed to them. Now as it is the heart which must influence our obedience or disobedience thereto, upon which an eternity of happiness or misery depends ; it may surely, with great propriety, be said, that out of the *heart are the issues of life*, and let me add, *death* too ; and with great reason therefore does the wise man advise us to *keep it with all diligence*.

It will be still a greater spur to our diligence, if we consider, not only the dreadful consequence if our heart should make a wrong choice, but also the many thousand temptations it will meet with, to persuade it to do so. We are sojourners in a world very different

ferent from that which God hath designed for our abode. We are now but too manifestly in a state of corruption; and every thing about us is too fatally fitted to corrupt us still more. The soul is spiritual, and its objects therefore must be of a spiritual nature; it is immortal, and must consequently be designed for a state of immortality; whereas there is nothing here but what is mortal and material. Again, consider the soul as distinguished into the understanding, the will, and the passions; and the understanding, as by nature the superior, should naturally have the command of the other two; and yet all the objects of this world tend to enflame our passions, to pervert our wills, and to make the best part of us preposterously serve the worst. In short, so much sin and wickedness everywhere abound, that we can hardly open our eyes or our ears, but something or other will be ready to rush in that is apt to corrupt the mind, and taint the imagination.

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Thus

Thus it is no small difficulty to prevent ill thoughts; and when once ill thoughts are admitted, ill words and actions will naturally follow. Human laws may indeed put some check upon these, but a very ineffectual one sure; since where-ever there may be secrecy, there may be impunity too; and consequently if the heart once conceives sin, it will find opportunity enough, in spite of all human penalties, to be delivered of it too. But granting, for supposition sake, that human laws could extend much farther, even to lay an absolute restraint upon all our words and actions; so that whatever wickedness might lurk in the heart, it could never be uttered or acted without punishment; yet what would all this signify? since, in the account of morality, the heart is the principle, and the intention the crime; and consequently the sinner, however he might escape all inflictions from the world, would be still subject to the lashes of his conscience, and the vengeance of an offended God, for ten thousand crimes, which

which he might never have had in his power to execute.

In short, human laws consider vice chiefly as it affects society; and consequently, if they can but prevent its ill consequences with regard to that, their design is, in a great measure, answered; but it is for God, who knoweth the hearts, to lay the restraint upon *them*; and to prevent not only the effects of sin, but the cause of it also. And herein the excellency of the Gospel appears, in that it strikes at the very root of the evil; that sin may never show itself in our words and actions, it will not suffer us so much as to give it the least entertainment, even in our thoughts. It arraigns every lewd desire only as adultery; every wrathful and malicious intention as murder. And how severe soever the Gospel may seem in this, nevertheless as this is the only way to stop the growth of sin, it will, upon consideration, be found, to be as *merciful* as it is *wise*; tending equally to the *benefit* of *man*, and the *glory* of *God*.

Now that this is the only way to prevent sin, is too plain to need any proof. Can we expect that the streams should be pure, and yet the spring that feeds them be corrupted? as little reason have we to expect, that virtuous actions should issue from a vitiated heart. The heart, in this respect, bears some analogy to the soil; in which you may sow what you please; but as the seed is, such will the produce be. *A good tree, says our blessed Saviour, cannot bring forth corrupt fruit; neither a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit.* Luke vi. 43.

But, to illustrate this matter in the two instances lately mentioned, we will suppose then adultery to be forbidden. Now the question is, whether is the more likely method to prevent us from incurring its guilt, the being debarred from all the remotest tendencies thereto, or only from the bare commission of itself? I dare say I can no sooner propose the question, than all of you are ready to give it the same answer. Then is the best time
to

SERMON III. 53

to attack an enemy, when he is at the weakest; and the most effectual way to prevent the crime, is to prevent all the temptations that lead to it. On the contrary, should the eye be suffered to dwell on every wanton object it meets with, and the heart be so far from rejecting any loose imaginations, as to be ready to receive them, and to give them a welcome too; what after this could be expected, but that the man, who hath so shamefully given up the reins to his appetites hitherto, should at last quite lose the command of them; and be hurried on by them to any brutal excesses whatsoever?

And thus again, with regard to murder. Were we bid only to abstain from the act itself, but permitted, in the mean time, to harbour anger in our breasts, and to cherish it on to malicious and revengeful thoughts, the thing were impracticable; for malicious intentions naturally produce mischievous effects, and the revenge of the heart will become the revenge of the hand soon. But now the

Gospel, by charging the guilt of murder on the heart that conceives it, applies the remedy there, from whence the disease springs; and so, by teaching us to lay a curb upon the first motions of anger, takes the only natural way to prevent the ill consequences that would follow the indulgence of it. And surely this proceeding must appear, at first sight, to be highly *merciful* in God, as being every way so *beneficial* to man.

As eternal misery is the consequence of all wilful sin, whatever method should be prescribed that would prevent that, how difficult soever, must needs be highly *merciful*; inasmuch as the difficulty on one hand, bears no proportion at all to the danger on the other. But this method must appear still more *merciful*, since it is not only the most effectual way to prevent sin, but the easiest too. It is certainly much easier to keep the government of the passions at first, than to recover it, after it is lost; as it is to prevent a breach, than to repair it. It is easier for a man, in every respect,

spect, with regard to his temporal, as well as spiritual, concerns; the health of his body, and the peace of his mind; his happiness both here, and hereafter. This will put him into the only proper frame of mind for heaven; and even now give him, as it were, a foretaste of it. Nor is this method at all more *merciful* than it is *wise*; being what concerns God's honour no less than our good.

How could it be consistent with God to permit sin in its causes, and yet be angry at its effects, i. e. first to encourage sin, and then to punish the sinner? And yet this were the consequence, should he permit sin in our thoughts, and yet condemn it in our words and actions. Certainly this were a proceeding as opposite to God and goodness as can be imagined. This were the very character of Satan himself; first to tempt men to wickedness, and afterwards to accuse them for it.

Consider God as a spirit; and consequently they that worship him, must worship him in

spirit and in truth; otherwise their godliness were but form; their religion but hypocrisy: And what a notion then must we entertain of God, if we can think him thus capable of being imposed upon? and yet thus we must think of him, if we can believe that he will accept of the devotion of the lips and the hands, when the heart is far from him.

Consider him again as our Creator; and he must undoubtedly have a right to our whole obedience, as his creatures; and how then can it be consistent, either for *us* to neglect, or for *him* to dispense with, the principal part of our obedience, that of the heart.

Again, how could it consist with a Being of infinite knowledge, and to whom therefore the hearts of all men lie open, to be regardless of whatever should pass there? At this rate, wherein would the Divine law be more excellent and extensive than human laws are? No, doubtless, when God is called the Searcher of hearts, it can never be meant as an empty title; but ought to convince us, that

that it is the heart of man which he principally regards; and that is certainly the most worthy of his regard, if for this reason only, that it is cognizable by none but him. As no other being therefore can give a law to that, it is highly for God's honour that he *should*, nor would his character, either as a Lawgiver or a Judge, be compleat, unless he *did*.

In a word, the soul bears a resemblance to the Divine Nature in its *spirituality*; and ought therefore to resemble it in its *purity* too; not can it be consistent with a Being of infinite holiness, to suffer the contrary.

And now need I press you to keep your heart with all diligence? Is it not apparently for your ease and happiness to do so? And hath not God, by enjoining such a purity of heart, been as *merciful* as *wise*, consulting *our good* no less than *his glory*?

But perhaps it may be objected, that after all our care, bad thoughts will sometimes rise even in the best of men; and consequently such a purity as is enjoined, is impracticable.

To

To this I shall endeavour to give such an answer, as may ease tender consciences, on the one hand, without opening a door to licentiousness, on the other. And the answer is short and easy; that no thoughts, which are not consented to by the will, are to be accounted sinful; those only are sinful which are voluntary; and more or less sinful, as more or less voluntary.

The mind receives all its ideas originally from the senses, and is entirely passive to the first impressions they shall make upon it. It can no more help those images which they shall represent to it, than a glass can the reflection of those objects that occasionally come before it. Idle and rash thoughts therefore will sometimes come up in their turn, as well as others, nor can the best of men be wholly exempted from them. Nay, and it may happen, from the particular constitutions and complexions, infirmities and disorders of some, and these good men too, that such thoughts shall be predominant in their mind,

not

not only make their way into it, but, for a time, take possession of it; and, bad as they are, engender still worse; even profane, atheistical, and blasphemous thoughts; till the poor wretches shall be haunted by them to that degree, as, at last, to be driven by them into the very depth of despair. This calamity, I say, may be incident to very good men; for the fumes of melancholy will cloud the reason, as well as the imagination; and when the body is much disordered, the mind will receive a tincture from it. But then, I say, that this is plainly an infirmity; and which God, who knows our weaknesses, will pity, and not condemn; and whatever a person, during such a disorder, should either think, or say, or do, would never be imputed to him as a crime. Such persons as I am speaking of, when they are troubled with these rash and idle, profane or blasphemous thoughts, are still complaining of them as their grievance; and what plainer evidence therefore can there be, that their wills are
not

not consenting to them? Whenever they are mentioned, it is with horror; which shows, that they are the objects not of their approbation, but aversion; not their choice, but their misfortune. It is from the reluctance of the will, that they raise such tumults in the mind; whereas did they come in with the consent of the will, they would find a quieter reception, And this too is a sure sign, could they but have the sense to see it, that the evil one has not that power over them in this case, as they are apt to imagine he has; if he had, it would certainly be his business rather to reconcile them to those thoughts, which are now their greatest terror, and to lull them on to a fatal security. This would be his business; as, with regard to hardened sinners, we find it is his constant practice: So that these thoughts are either not at all from the devil; or if they are, the guilt of them is wholly his. And however therefore they may fancy themselves outcasts of God, as being unable to exert any one act of faith or duty towards him;

him; yet as this indisposition arises probably altogether from the body, but certainly from no formed principle of disobedience, no settled purpose of the will; it is not to be doubted but they will partake of God's favour, how much soever they may despair of it; and though they may condemn themselves in this world, find themselves everlastingly acquitted in the next.

But let not what I have here said for the comfort of those poor wretches, who complain of ill thoughts as their grievance, and are subject to them from a natural infirmity, be wrested to the security of those, who, in defiance of reason and religion, incur them by neglect or choice. It is true, whilst the mind is passive, the man is innocent; but then, let us beware how we account the mind so, where it certainly is not. We cannot help the first impressions that objects will make upon it; but we may choose whether we will give them a harbour there; and so, though we may be innocent as to their incur-

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sion, we may still be guilty as to their continuance. Again, we find by experience, that there are certain objects that are apt to raise wicked thoughts in us: In this case, what have we to do to prevent such thoughts, but to keep out of the way of such objects as excite them? But now, on the contrary, if we, though sensible of our own weakness, will be perusing such writings, conversing with such persons, or frequenting such places, as are apt to taint the imagination, our negligence is criminal; and we shall be answerable for every sinful thought, which it was in our power to have prevented. And if it be a crime not to do what we can to prevent ill thoughts; it must certainly be a much greater still to indulge them.

And now, having shown the necessity of keeping our hearts with all diligence, viz. because out of it are the issues of life, i. e. because all our thoughts, words and actions, in short, all our moral conduct here, and our eternal interest hereafter, depend upon it; and

and withal guarded the doctrine of the text against the only objection to which I can conceive it to be liable, I shall spend the remainder of my discourse in laying down such rules, as may enable us to keep them the most effectually, so as best to secure our innocence here, and happiness hereafter.

In the *first* place then, to avoid evil thoughts, let us be sure to avoid idleness, the great inlet to them. For, as I before observed, the soul is of an active nature, that will exert itself one way or other; and if we will not take care to employ it innocently, the tempter will be sure to employ it to his purposes. However idle we may be, yet he is always busy; and then most busy when we are most idle; and what then can be expected, when the mind is thus open and empty as it were, but that the evil one will enter, and take possession? On the contrary, when the mind is engaged, it will either not see foreign objects; or not be at leisure to attend them. They may just tincture it in passing by; but
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leave no impression behind them: as with a glasse, the object is no sooner gone, but the image is gone with it. As therefore some vocation or other is adviseable upon a civil; so much more upon a religious, account; even as much as the everlasting happiness of the next world is of more concernment than all the momentary interests of the next.

However as the mind will be weakened by being overstrained, nor can be duly exercised, but it must be now and then relieved too; I shall lay it down as a *second* rule for the good government of our thoughts, that we be very careful in the choice of our diversions.

As human nature is generally corrupt; so every man has his particular corruption; some stronger propensity to one vice than another; consequently where a man's weakness lies, there ought his guard especially to be. This ruling passion in every man's breast, is what it behoves every man carefully to observe; and to keep clear of such objects, as are apt to give growth to it. Thus, is a man of an hasty temper?

S E R M O N III. 63

temper? then certainly all games of chance, however they may, when used with moderation, be lawful in others, must be very unsafe diversions for him. Does another find any sparks of licentiousness within him? then let him carefully decline all acquaintance with the persons, the writings, and entertainments of the pleasurable part of mankind; which are all of them so many several incentives to it. In a word, we are to have an eye to the mind's good, even when we unbend it most; and therefore to choose such recreations for it, as may divert, without deceiving and ensnaring it at the same time.

In the *third* place, Let us frequently examine our hearts; observe all the first motions of virtue or vice rising in us, that we may the more effectually give a check to the one, and an encouragement to the other. Every thing is weakest at first; and consequently, if good, it requires then our greater care in raising it; if bad, the less difficulty in suppressing it. The man who balances his accounts

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often, if there is any wrong article in his conduct, sees it before it is too late to rectify it; whereas he who carelessly lets them run on for a long time together, can neither thrive in his temporal or spiritual concerns, and is rarely made sensible of his error, but by the woeful consequences of it. How often this examination is to be made, is neither easy nor necessary for me to determine; since that will vary according as people's circumstances vary. In this therefore every man must be his own casuist; but certainly it is a good general rule, that we should all of us make this examination as often as we can.

Fourthly, Let us profit ourselves what we can, by reading and meditating on the works of good men in all ages; but especially let us be conversant in the Scriptures, those sacred treasuries, whence we may be provided with a supply for all our spiritual wants. *There* the heart is plied with all sorts of motives and engagements, to secure and enliven its obedience: *There* are set before us, in one view, the

the plainest precepts, the brightest examples, the most glorious rewards, the most terrible punishments: In short, every consideration that can make either virtue eligible, or vice detestable. There is not a single passion in our nature, which is not *there* interested in the choice of holiness; there is not an attribute in the Divine Nature, which is not *there* made to inculcate it: Especially God's infinite knowledge, justice and power are *there* so abundantly and eminently displayed, that it is almost impossible for him, who considers them as he ought, to give sin the least harbour in his heart; as being assured, that it can neither escape unseen, nor unpunished.

Lastly, To our own best endeavours let us add (what alone can make our endeavours effectual) our prayers to the Throne of Grace. It is prayer that will engage the protection and assistance of the Almighty; and if God be with us, what though all the powers of hell be against us? Nor is prayer only a good preservative against temptation, as God hath

promised his spirit to them that ask it, but as, by its own nature, it disposes the heart to receive it. Prayer hath God and heaven for its objects; and consequently sets the soul loose from that attachment to the world, by which sin is too apt to insinuate itself. It is almost impossible for a man heartily to pray against, and yet yield to, a temptation, at the same time. A man must either leave off his prayers, or his sins; for light and darkness, God and mammon, can never unite together. Let us then pray to God continually, fervently, and faithfully; for so only shall we pray effectually. So shall the Holy Spirit delight to dwell in our hearts; and, by keeping us innocent in this state of probation, prepare us for that blessed place, where, in the society of angels, and just men made perfect, we shall be holy and happy to all eternity.

S E R M O N IV.

P R O V. xxviii. 1.

—The righteous are bold as a lion.

REason is the peculiar prerogative of man; that which sets him at the greatest distance from the rest of the creatures. Look upon him as under the influence of his passions and sensual appetites, and you see him but too much upon a level with the brute beasts that perish; but look upon him as conducting himself by the rules of right reason, and you then see him, as he ought to be, the image of God. It is reason that points out virtue to him, and bids him pursue it; that shows him what vice is, and bids him detest it. And indeed what is virtue, but the acting up to the dictates of reason? or vice, but the swerving from them? In short, there is an inseparable connexion between reason and

virtue ; so that, where either of them is wanting, there the other must be wanting too ; where the one is, there the other must be also.

The same inseparable union which there is between reason and virtue in general, the same also is there between the several virtues, as they stand related to each other. That man can never be truly liberal, who is not frugal too ; frugal, that he may have wherewithal to be liberal ; to derive the streams in such a proportion, as not to dry up the source from which they are supplied. Frugality, when terminating in a man's self, is no better than covetousness ; and an indiscreet liberality is no better than profuseness. Thus neither can there be any true moderation without zeal, nor any true zeal without moderation ; moderation would be too languid, without zeal to invigorate it ; and zeal too impetuous, without moderation to restrain it. Without the one, a man would be, as it were, all frost ; and without the other, all flame. Thus
again,

again, courage, without prudence, would but serve to expose a man to unnecessary dangers; prudence, without courage, would tend only to disquiet him with the prospect of future calamities, at the same time that he is sinking perhaps under the weight of the present. Life, without courage, could never be easy; nor, without prudence, could it ever be safe. They are both so mutually necessary, that neither can subsist alone: Were they once separated, you would see the one degenerate into cowardice, and the other into foolhardiness. It were easy to instance in the rest of the virtues, and to show how closely they are all linked together; so closely, that no man, who is wholly wanting in but one, can be properly said to be master of any.

As there is this necessary dependence of the several virtues one upon the other; so is courage still more peculiarly necessary, as being the support of them all; and without which, they would all be precarious. What can bear man up under the many evils of life, or

against the fears of death, but this? Without this, there is no man, make but death the alternative, who would not betray his friend, or renounce his God: Without this, there is no virtue, which a man might not be brought to give up; nor any sin, which he might not be forced to comply with. Since then courage is so necessary a virtue, as we have seen it is; it will be well worth our enquiry to examine into the nature of it; and the rather, because there are so many false notions of it prevailing in the world. Accordingly then, from the words which I have just now read to you, I shall endeavour to explain, *first*, wherein true courage consists; from whence it will be easy, in the *second* place, to prove, that there can be no true courage at all but in a *good man*; it can never be in perfection but in a *good Christian*. *The righteous are bold as a lion.*

First then, we are to enquire wherein true courage consists; and towards this enquiry we have made some considerable advances already, in observing, that there is an inseparable

rable connexion between reason and virtue in general; that there is the same between the several virtues with each other; and that courage is necessary for the support of them all: For from hence it evidently follows, that that can never be true courage, which is actuated by any motive that is irrational, much less that is sinful, or by any indeed that is not exactly agreeable to all the dictates of reason and virtue. Thus, should a man take it in his head that he must needs go and make converts from Popery, even at Rome itself; every body must see that he can have no such commission from religion; nor ought that therefore to be answerable for the freaks of enthusiasm. If he runs himself into unnecessary dangers, he must even thank himself for them; and if he dies for his pains, he dies not as a martyr, but as a madman. In short, true zeal never puts a man upon seeking needless adventures; and there is no such thing as knight errantry in reason. Thus again: Should we look into many of those heroes which

which make such a figure in history, stripped of those spurious honours which their victories have thrown round them, we should find them rather mean than great; and the objects not so much of admiration as contempt. We are to measure them not from the wideness of their dominions, but from the motives upon which they enlarge them; for unless it be a good cause that draws the sword, not all the success in the world can justify it.

But not to dwell any longer on generals, I shall now come more particularly to point out wherein true courage consists; in order to which, we have need only to consider, that it has evil or pain for its object; and then to examine in what circumstances, and upon what accounts, that evil may be eligible. Now to make it eligible, it will be sufficient, that it appear the means of procuring a greater good, or of preventing a greater evil; for in such a case, it comes under the notion of good; and as such only can it be matter of choice. Nor let it be urged here, that I am confounding

two virtues, prudence and courage, together; for the share that each of them has in this, is visible and distinct enough. It is for prudence to direct, and for courage to execute; for the one, to tell when an evil is to be submitted to; and for the other, undauntedly to submit to it. The one acts as principal; the other as second; but both of them equally necessary; either of them by itself insufficient: So that true courage may be defined, a constancy of mind to bear evils upon rational principles.

Now with respect to the evils of life, they may all be reduced under this twofold distinction, either as dangers voluntarily to be undertaken; or as calamities patiently to be endured. As to the first,

Suppose we see a man in imminent danger of his life: Grant but a probability of our power to save it, and we certainly ought to attempt it, though with hazard of our own. And this is built upon that well-known maxim in equity, that we should do as we would be done unto. Now certainly we, in
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that person's circumstances, should expect it from him; and consequently the same right has he to expect it from us. If therefore reason offers this danger to us, it is not so much courage to accept it, as cowardice to decline it. Thus again: Should one's country be invaded; what man is there of sense enough but to know the relation between the whole and its parts, between the community itself and the several members of which it is composed, but must needs perceive it his duty to meet the enemy upon such an occasion? what man of courage but would gladly shed his blood in so noble a cause? When we read, in the Roman history, of that celebrated duel between the three brothers of each army, which was to determine the whole war; we see plainly the reason, and therein the courage, of that action; the reason, in that so few lives are well lost to save the lives of so many thousands; the courage, in that they so cheerfully consent to lay down theirs as the ransom.

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But to come now, *secondly*, to those evils which are patiently to be endured, and which perhaps, whatever the world may think to the contrary, are generally much surer tests of a man's courage than the other. It is true, there is that pomp and glitter in all enterprising courage, in that particularly of the field, that it is no wonder if the vulgar take their measures of it from thence; but were we to judge of it according to the truth of things, I am satisfied we might be furnished with as great, and much more frequent, instances of it in private life. Thus, should a man stand firm and resolved in the discharge of his duty, notwithstanding all the temptations of bribes and menaces to draw him from it; though thousands revolt from it on his right hand, and ten thousands on his left; whatever the degenerate part of mankind might think or say of him, he must be a man of courage. On the contrary, let a man have signalized himself ever so much in the day of battle; yet if we see him afterwards supple and servile for

for his interest, a slave to his passions and vices ; we cannot but alter the good opinion we had conceived of him ; and his having so little of any other virtue, must make us conclude, that neither was his courage of the true and genuine stamp. He might have been hurried on by the heat of the battle ; and consequently deserve no more commendation for what he did then, than would a man for what he did in the deliriums of a fever. Perhaps he had no choice but to fight or die ; and so the very fear of death might have made him desperate. In short, no man can conquer an enemy upon a truly brave principle, who cannot conquer his own passions too.

But to come to cases of more common life, and more general use. You have received an injury perhaps : Is it such a one as cannot be put up, and the law will redress ? then apply to that for a remedy. Is it beneath the notice of the law ? then think it beneath yours too : Such a trifle as that can hardly merit your resentment, much less your revenge.

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Is it your fortune to be slandered? By whom? Not by a good man; he scorns to slander his neighbour; and the slander of a bad man will never stick. But the world, you will say, is generally credulous; and the slander is apt to be remembred, when the slanderer is forgot. But here again the question recurs, What do you mean by the world? The wise and good will never take up opinions without grounds; and what the fools and knaves think of you, is not worth your regarding. Let the tenor of your life be virtuous, and that will soon baffle the malice of such impotent defamers. It is virtue generally that first opens the mouth of calumny; and it is that alone which can effectually silence it again. It is the sun that raises the vapours; and the same sun that raised, can disperse them. An injury is no injury till it is felt; and not to feel it therefore must be more truly glorious, than to return it. But perhaps you will say, that the injury is of such a nature, that your *honour* is concerned to revenge it. But whence is the
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standard of honour to be taken? Surely from that eternal relation which things bear to each other, and not from men's false opinions about them. If they are unreasonable, that can be no excuse for our being so. In indifferent things, fashion may be allowed to prescribe; but in all things unlawful or sinful, what the majority does is so far from being our rule, that it is our duty, and indeed a principal part of courage, to oppose it. Thus, because custom has made the putting up an affront pass for cowardice, therefore the duellist must needs revenge every affront that is offered him; and rather than be thought perhaps a liar, prove himself a murderer: An odd way of proceeding this, that because another has *said* a foolish thing, I must therefore *do* one a thousand times more foolish. One ought to consider the thing said, and the person that said it: If the charge be true, we had better be silent than defend one crime by another; if it be false, yet our revenge of it will never make it appear so; our contempt of it may.

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It was said perhaps in the heat of wine or passion; and so ought no more to be regarded than the ravings of a madman. Again, as to the person: Was he a friend, or an enemy; a wife, or a weak man, that said it? If a friend, we should bear with a friend's infirmities; if an enemy, we should remember his evidence will not be admitted, for being an enemy; if a wise man, what he has said inadvertently he will not be ashamed to retract; if a weak man, it is the same as if it had never been said, because it will never be heeded. In short, law, reason, and religion are all against the duellist; and he has nothing but popular opinion on his side; but this he is so much a slave to, that he must take away another's life for a trifle, though he ventures his own in the bargain. And are our lives then of so little consequence, as to lie at the mercy of every hasty word, and to be the sport of every passion? No, surely they were given us for nobler purposes; not for ourselves alone, but for our families and our friends;

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for God's honour, and our country's good. When these are attacked, then is it our duty, then is it truly an honour to expose them. In a word, to revenge an injury, is what any man can do, and what the meanest of mankind are most ready to do; but to forgive an injury, is an attainment only of few, and is always a proof of a great and generous mind.

I shall mention but one instance more, of two persons under the same circumstances, but with a very different behaviour, and see to which the character of courage most properly belongs. We will suppose both of them ruined in their fortunes, destitute of friends, and reduced to a bed of sickness; the one discontented and murmuring, unruly and impatient, and in despair of finding his life ever easy, with his own hand resolutely putting an end to it; the other patient and resigned, calm and contented, resolved not to desert life till he has his release, but daring to live as long, or die as soon, as the Disposer of life and death shall think fit. Surely it must be
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evident at once, that, in the last case, the man acts upon true principles of courage; in the first, from nothing else but rashness and despair. Nor is this merely an imaginary case; it is what may be any man's lot, God knows how soon, or with what effect. Thus was Job tempted; and thus did he manifest his integrity: Thus, or even worse than thus, were the martyrs and primitive Christians exercised; all patterns of true holiness while they lived, and of true courage when they died; the one being the natural and necessary consequence of the other: For, as I undertook to prove, in the *second* place, there can be no true courage at all but in a good man; it can never be in perfection, but in a good Christian.

By a good man, I mean one who lives under the constant sense of a God and his providence; who easily conceives him to be an infinitely wise, good, and powerful Being; whom to please therefore, he infers, must be the chief honour, happiness, and perfection

of man: Who therefore makes it his chief endeavour to find out the Divine Will, under a full persuasion of God's goodness to guide him to it, and of his power to protect him in the practice of it: Who, in the several relations he stands in, is resolved to live, as near as he can, answerable to them all, in maintaining the dignity of his nature above that of the brutes, by acting up to reason, wherein that dignity consists; in observing the utmost justice, candour, and benevolence to man; and the most unfeigned piety, humility, and reverence towards his Maker: Who always bears in mind, that God's glory ought to be the principal aim of all his actions; and that that can be pursued only through the course of virtuous means; who consequently is ready to undertake any thing, be it ever so difficult, to attain this great end; or to endure any thing, be it ever so grievous, rather than thwart it: He is one, lastly, who in all cases, dares to do his duty, leaving the event of it to Providence, and trusting to that
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for his reward; which since he finds it does not always happen to the good man in this life, he naturally is led to hope for it in another.

Now such a man as this is undoubtedly a man of courage; and no other than such a one can properly be so: For as all virtues must be precarious, unless they have courage to support them; so must courage itself be, without the belief of a God, and the hopes of a future state. In many instances, it is granted, a man may seem to act prudently and boldly too, without this belief; he may perceive a present good to be probably attended with a much greater evil, and therefore forbear it; or he may perceive a present evil likely to draw after it a much greater good, and therefore endure it: But put it once to his choice, that he shall be either as happy, or as miserable, as this world can make him; provided, in the first case, that he gives up his integrity; or, in the second, that he is resolved to maintain it; and you will then see whether his courage be real or

no. If it fail him upon such a trial as this, you may be sure, that whatever glitter it may have made, yet it could never be sterling. Or suppose once more, that no other option is left him but to sin, or die, should he choose sin rather than death, notwithstanding all his former boasts of courage, he would prove himself a coward at last. Nor does it seem unreasonable, that such an one as I am now speaking of, should do so; for if a man has no views beyond this life, what has he to do but to make life as easy, and as long as he can? In short, no one can, upon a cool and wise deliberation, prefer the miseries of this life, before the comforts of it; or dare, in full strength and vigour, part with life itself, but upon the hopes, at least, of a recompence in another: So that the terms of the proposition are convertible; there is no true religion, without courage; there is no true courage, without religion.

But as we are to expect no true courage at all, except in a good man; so can we expect

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it in perfection only in a good Christian. The being of a God and his providence, and a future state of rewards and punishments, might indeed be highly probable from the deductions of reason, probable enough to animate a Socrates, or a Seneca, the wise men and the philosophers; but as for the vulgar, they were not capable of such painful researches. And as for the Jews themselves, the generality of them at least, seemed to confine their views too much to this present world, at best had but a glimmering prospect of eternity; but now first are life and immortality brought to light by the Gospel. We have had God incarnate amongst us, to teach us by his laws, and to inspire us by his example. He voluntarily became subject to death, the more visibly to triumph over it; and, by his resurrection, confirmed the certainty of ours. Well may we now therefore, in the language of the Apostle, cry out, *O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?* No softness of sex, or tenderness of nature, need

now sink under sickness, pain, poverty, or reproach, the want of friends, or injuries of fortune; let us be Christians, and we shall be above them all. What are all the advantages of this life, to one full of the glory of the next? They can be no objects of his passions; he can never be anxious in the pursuit of them, proud in the possession of them, or over disquieted at the loss of them. Again, what are all the evils of life to one who is sure, by God's grace, to be supported under them; and, through Christ's merits, to be infinitely rewarded for them? Should you attempt, by a dungeon or a rack, to force such a man from his duty, he might say, almost in Pompey's words, but upon a nobler principle of courage than he, my conscience is necessary, my life is not so: Or yet more expressly, in the words of St. Paul, *I am ready not only to be bound, but to die for the name of Jesus.* In short, let us but imitate the first disciples and professors of Christianity in their faith and sincerity, and then we may imitate them

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in their constancy too; troubled perhaps as they were on every side, but not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9. Then may each of us too take up the same exalted strain, which the same blessed Apostle did before, and say, *Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord, Rom. viii. 35—37, 38, 39.*

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, glory, might, majesty, and dominion, both now, and for evermore.

S E R M O N V.

ECCLES. vii. 14.

— *God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.*

The whole verse runs thus :
In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider : God also hath set the one over against the other, to the end that man should find nothing after him.

THIS verse has a fit connexion with the foregoing one ; *Consider the work of God ; for who can make straight what he hath made crooked ?* where, by the work of God, is generally understood, the work of his Providence : And so it may be thus paraphrased.

Remember that it is God who governs the world ; and that nothing can happen in it, but by his Providence ; and consequently that
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all the cross accidents of life, all those things which may appear crooked to us, are yet directed by Him; and not therefore to be bent and turned to our fancies and inclinations: Whatever He wille, must be; and there is no controuling it.

In this the wiseman shows the vanity of opposing God's purposes, or of hoping to find things always suited to our minds; and then, in the words of my text, goes on to exhort us to that, which answers the nearest to it; and which, for many wise reasons, is to be preferred before it, to bring our minds to suit with our conditions: So that, whether we be in prosperity, or whether we be in adversity, we may behave ourselves properly in each; joyful, but not dissolute, in the one; thoughtful, but not desponding, in the other; and that for this reason, among others, because God is the author of both, and hath so wisely mixed and blended them in our lives, that no one can justly find fault with God's

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disposal of them; or, all things fairly considered, know how to alter them for the better. In this verse are contained three distinct propositions, viz. *first*, That the design of God, in sending prosperity, is to give us joy and comfort in the use of it; *In the day of prosperity be joyful*. *Secondly*, That the proper end of adversity is to bring us to consideration; *but in the day of adversity consider*. And, *thirdly*, That God hath, for very wise reasons, made up our lives of a due mixture of both; *God also hath set the one over against the other, so the end that man should find nothing after him*. To the last of which, I shall confine my present discourse; and my method of treating it shall be this;

I. Briefly to state and confirm the matter of fact, that man's life is a mixture of prosperity and adversity. And,

II. To show the wisdom of God in so ordering it.

First, then, I am to state and confirm the matter of fact, that man's life is a mixture of
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prosperity and adversity; and for the truth of this, we need appeal no farther than to every man's own experience. Enquire of the most prosperous person in the world, and he will tell you he has his afflictions; and the most afflicted, if he is but ingenuous, must own, that he has his comforts too; that he has his days of prosperity also. Every one partakes, more or less, of the common blessings of life; every one is, more or less, a sharer in its common calamities too; and Providence is generally so equal in its distributions of both kinds, that it is very hard, if not absolutely impossible, to know which condition of life is the most prosperous, or which the most afflicted. Indeed were we to confine our notion of prosperity, as it is to be feared too many do, to wealth or grandeur, dress or equipage; to any or all of the circumstantial and mere trappings, as it were, of life; then had we need only to divide men into high and low, rich and poor, and to denominate them accordingly; since, at this rate, adversity would be-

belong to none but, the last of these, and prosperity be the sole privilege of the former. But what is prosperity, unless it be enjoyed? And what is adversity, unless it be felt? And yet it is certain, that in the midst of all the pomp, and power, and affluence of the world, you will often find much real misery; and as often much true content and solid happiness without them. However therefore these may be the vulgar notions of prosperity and adversity, they must needs mean very different in the account of Scripture and reason. And that they do so, we need look no farther than the words of my text; where they are said to befall all men indifferently, and by turns; and to be tempered in such a wise and due proportion, that no one can have any just reason to complain of God's distribution of them; since every man has as much of the one as is fitting, and no more of the other than is absolutely needful for him; but were that vulgar notion true, which I just now mentioned, you might then affirm of many, that they never
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had any prosperity at all; and of others, that they never wanted it; and consequently that both the assertion in my text, and the argument built upon it, were vain and groundless. In short then, be each man's condition in life what it will, high or low, rich or poor; yet whenever he is furnished with those things that are requisite and sufficient for that condition, and has nothing to interrupt him in the enjoyment of them, then, properly, is it his day of prosperity. On the contrary, whatever his station be, yet when he wants, or is deprived of those means that are necessary for that station, then it is fitly to be called his day of adversity. This is what is meant by the words, as they are used in my text, and of which the assertion is true, that each man's life is made up of a mixture of both. Health and sickness, joy and trouble, success and disappointment, unexpected benefits, and unforeseen injuries, succeed each other through every part and period of our lives; sometimes more slowly and gradually; and sometimes with

with so quick a transition, that the sense of the one is immediately lost and swallowed up in the other. Sometimes we suffer in our own persons; and at other times, through the persons of our friends, or relations; of those who are nearest in our concerns, or dearest in our affections. And there is no way by which grief may attack us, but by which joy may enter too; so that however calm and settled our fortune in other respects may be, it may yet be more or less agitated too by the ebbs and flows of those about us. And this vicissitude of prosperous and unlucky events, this variety of good and evil, is not peculiar to a few only, or confined to this or that sort of men more especially; but general and universal; the common lot of all mankind. Such is the nature of God's providence, in the government of the world. And,

II. The *wisdom* of this dispensation is what I shall now make appear, in several particulars; as, first, Because it makes us relish prosperity the better; and value it the more when

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we have it. Secondly, Because it brings mankind pretty much upon a level; and so naturally tends to make us less envious at other men's conditions, and more easy and contented in our own. Thirdly, Because it gives the greater room for trials of all sorts; and is therefore admirably fitted for this life, as a state of probation for a better. And, fourthly, As it serves to convince us of our absolute dependence upon God, in opposition to two extremes; of presuming in prosperity, and of despairing in adversity.

First, then, I say, it serves to make us relish prosperity the better, and value it the more when we have it. It is not in the nature of this world to yield true satisfaction in any thing; its best things grow insipid by use, and pall upon the enjoyment. They may strike our senses pretty strongly indeed at the first, and please us for a while; but as their novelty goes off, our pleasure is sure to go off with it. The ear may be glutted with the sweetest sounds; the eye tired of the finest

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prospect. Our gratification arises not so much from the things themselves, as from the variety and succession of them; not so much from the worth, as the freshness of the object. There is nothing in nature so agreeable, but what, in a little time, we are apt to droop over; and therefore it is necessary sometimes to change the scene, to quicken the sensation. Thus, you may observe many a man who abounds most in prosperity, put upon a thousand shifts how to bear it tolerably; forced to contrive all the arts of deceiving time he can think of; amusement upon amusement; one diversion after another; and yet (whether it be that they are too much of the same kind to supply the variety that is wanted) after he has run over the whole circle of pleasures, he returns empty and unsatisfied from them all. Indeed then only do we taste prosperity in perfection, when we have experienced adversity before; the woes of the one naturally heightening the joys of the other. It is in this, as in all nature besides,

every thing that is agreeable, owes its being so in a great measure, to something that is opposite to it. Thus, a clear day appears still clearer after a dark night; and a calm is doubly pleasant after a storm. Thus, we owe the chief relish of health to sickness, of ease, to pain; of abundance, to want. In short, of all the several comforts and enjoyments of life, to their contrary distresses and calamities. So that it was no mere rant of a virtuous heathen, when he said, that nothing could be more unhappy than the man who had never felt any adversity.

And what makes us relish prosperity the better, must naturally make us value it the more too, when we have it; for as its happiness consists not so much in the sense of the good it brings, as of the evil it frees us from, this surely must teach us to use it soberly and cautiously; that is, having formerly smarted under any adversity, as poverty, or sickness suppose, we may not squander away again, either our wealth by extravagance, or our health

health by intemperance: That if we have at any time known what the misery of confinement is, we use our liberty with such moderation, as to prevent, what we can, the loss of it again.

The wisdom of this dispensation will appear yet more evident, when we consider, *Secondly*, that it brings mankind pretty much upon the level, and so naturally tends to make us less envious at other men's conditions, and more easy and contented in our own.

The variety of outward circumstances that distinguishes us into high and low, rich and poor, those that exercise authority, and those that are subject to it, is not more evident to every thinking man, than is its absolute necessity for the good and welfare of mankind.

Were men once brought upon a level in these respects, all things would immediately run into disorder, that mutual dependence, which such a variety of circumstances occasions, would then be destroyed; and consequently the chief strength and cement of society be

dissolved. But then, however needful those different ranks and conditions of life may be for the good of the community in general; it is certain that the happiness or misery of individuals is but little affected by them. It is not so much what a man's condition is, as whether he has, or wants, those things that are necessary to its enjoyment; and these may sometimes be wanting to the greatest monarch, at the same time that they abound to the meanest cottager. What can all the pomp, and power, and splendour in the world avail to one labouring under an acute and violent distemper? Alas! they can neither ease nor remove it; they serve rather to upbraid his weakness, than to relieve his misery. On the contrary, when we see any one healthful and chearful, though at the plough-tail, can we think that he needs any addition of fortune to add to his happiness? In short then, let men differ ever so much as to circumstantial, (and such are all outward distinctions to be counted) yet that makes no real difference, while

while in essentials they agree. And this one consideration, well urged and applied, is enough to prevent all the causes of envy at once. Could wealth or grandeur serve as a privilege to exempt men from the common calamities of life, pain or sickness, loss of friends or reputation, injuries or accidents; then indeed something might be said in its behalf. It would then be no wonder if those, who were debarred these privileges, should envy those who enjoyed them; since there is no station so high as to be exempted from the common accidents of nature, nor any so low as to be excluded, in its turn, from its common blessings, but that a vicissitude of good and evil, prosperity and adversity, is equally the lot of both; what grounds can there be for us either to envy other men's conditions, or to be discontented with our own? Alas! we see that the most flourishing state of others is but very uncertain, and therefore not to be envied; that our own, be it ever so bad, yet is not worse than that of

many about us, much better than we deserve, and therefore not to be repined at, what probably will soon be amended, and therefore patiently to be borne.

The wisdom of this dispensation will appear more evident still, in the third place, as it gives the greater room for trials of all sorts, and is therefore admirably fitted for this life, as a state of probation for a better.

It is certain that prosperity and adversity have each of them virtues peculiar to themselves. Such, for instance, of the former sort, are temperance and sobriety, in opposition to that vicious excess and intemperance which prosperity is but too apt to betray us into; as, on the contrary, true fortitude, patience and resignation can never be so properly tried, never appear with that lustre, as in the day of adversity; but now were any man's life to consist wholly, either of the one or the other of these, neither could the trial of his virtue be so complete here, nor consequently would the reward of it be so great

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hereafter. How admirable therefore is the wisdom and goodness of God, in contriving such a vicissitude as this, to make every man, more or less, experience each of these in their turns, and so to exercise, in their turns, the several virtues of each. Thus, hardly is there any one, to whom Providence hath been so sparing, but that he has, at one time or other, known what it is to abound; if he then, at such a time, has chose to spend that superfluity, be it ever so little, rather in gluttony and drunkenness, than in prudently providing for his own future wants, or in relieving, what he could, the pressing necessities of others, he hath reason to think, that were his fortune more enlarged, his sins would but be multiplied; and therefore to thank God for making him partake more of adversity, which he finds, by experience, he is better able to bear. Or again, hath he been still careful to improve every little interval of prosperity to all the good purposes in his power? what a comfortable reflection must this needs be to him, that

that he has been tried, and found faithful in this respect also? He may reasonably conclude from hence, that it is not from God's displeasure that his share of prosperity is no greater than it is; on the contrary, may he not rather piously hope, that Providence may have therefore exercised him the more with afflictions, as knowing that his example would hereby be more useful and illustrious? that by his heroic faith and patience, he might be more eminently instrumental to the glory of God, and the good of men; in which case, as he cannot fail of a particular support in this world, so may he rest assured of an extraordinary recompense in the next. The same too might be observed of the great and wealthy part of mankind, that were their lives to run smoothly on, in one settled course of prosperity, their trial would be much more imperfect, and the testimony of their conscience proportionably less clear and satisfactory. It was the devil's insinuation against Job, that he served not God for nought; and
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that as thankful as he seemed, while he now abounded in all the enjoyments of life, he would murmur as much, were he stripped of them. Then only therefore was his integrity thoroughly manifested to the world, and to himself too, when he had borne the greatest afflictions with piety and resignation; when he could say, whether in prosperity or adversity, I have been still the same; not corrupted by the one, nor dejected by the other.

The wisdom of this dispensation will appear yet more manifest, if we consider, in the *last* place, that it serves to convince us of our absolute dependence upon God; in opposition to two extremes, of presuming in prosperity, and of despairing in adversity.

Now when we see the rich and prosperous equally subject with the poor and needy, not only to all the infirmities of nature, pain, sickness, weakness of body, and the like, but also to that infinite variety of outward accidents that make a lottery, as it were, of every man's life, and may, in a moment, quite alter
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the state of it: When we see the meanest persons sometimes advanced, of a sudden, to the highest grandeur, and the greatest, as suddenly, brought down to the lowest misery, contrary to all human probability, and as well in defiance of the security of the one, as beyond the hopes, and even wishes, of the other. When we see, as the wiseman expresses it, *servants upon horses, and princes walking as servants upon the earth*, Job. x. 6. surely this must convince us how weak and precarious all the dependencies of this world are; and should naturally therefore teach us to place our dependence upon something beyond it. By such a various distribution as this, God seems to speak to us as plainly as he does through the mouth of his prophet, when he saith, *Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might: let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the Lord, which exercise loving kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth,*

Job. ix. 24. Or again, is any one in trouble and adversity, and does not this unexpected revolution, so visible every where, naturally suggest to him the same question that the Platonist puts to himself, *Why art thou so vexed? O my soul, and why art thou so disquieted within me?* And does it not almost necessarily dictate the same pious advice too, *Worry about the Lord's desire; be strong, and be shall comfort thy heart.* In short, such an uncertainty of events as this, seriously considered, as it shows us the vanity of all human dependencies, so must it show us likewise the necessity of your absolute dependence upon God; and he who hath God for his support, must needs be prepared against all events whatever; so as neither to presume upon the most prosperous of them, nor to despair under the most afflicted. For instance, let a man's prosperity be ever so great, yet if he acknowledges his dependence upon God, he must own it was God who gave it; and consequently, as he gave it, that he may resume it at pleasure.

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He must know too for what ends it was given him, namely, to try and manifest his virtue; and that accordingly therefore as he behaves himself in it, he shall be either rewarded or punished for it, very probably, in this life, but most assuredly in the next. And what then is there in it to make him either secure or presumptuous? secure of what he cannot command, and presumptuous upon that, for which he must be accountable? No, rather must it make him compassionate and benevolent; as not knowing how soon he may become an object of compassion in his turn, as much in need of relief as the most miserable object that now begs it at his hands. It should naturally make him thankful indeed to God, for having entrusted him with such a talent; but humble likewise and pious in the use of it, as fearing lest it should be taken from him again, so much more, lest it should be continued to him, not in mercy, but in wrath; not as a blessing, but a curse.

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On the contrary, let a man's adversity be ever so great; yet, if he believes a Providence (and who can think, and not believe one?) he must needs be satisfied to whom his adversity is owing; and that God, who sent it, can, and will, as to his wisdom shall seem most expedient, either deliver him out of it, or support him under it. He knows, that be his afflictions ever so grievous, yet they are no worse than what many of the most eminent saints have endured before him; and therefore may he piously hope they are meant as well in mercy to him, as to them; and that, however he may fail of a temporal deliverance, he shall certainly meet with an everlasting reward. Can he reflect on either his Saviour's sufferings for merits, on what He bore, or what He hath purchased for him, and either despair under his own afflictions, or murmur upon the account of them? The greatest present afflictions, which are but, as it were, for a moment, must needs seem light when compared to an exceeding and eternal weight

weight of glory. This should in reason be the case, were his whole stay here to be one continued scene of sorrow; however, since the infirmity of human nature is such, that we are but too prone in prosperity to forget God, and in adversity to murmur against him; in the one, to presume; and in the other, to despair; how good and merciful, as well as wise, is it in Providence, to make every man's life, more or less, a mixture of both: So that the most miserable is not without his intervals of comfort to support him, nor the most prosperous without his turns of afflictions to awaken him; so that neither the one having reason to be so fond of this world, as to be unwilling to leave it; nor the other, on the contrary, to be so tired of it, as to be tempted, before the call of nature, to desert it; they may both, at last, be found worthy to meet in the world to come, in that everlasting kingdom which God hath prepared for them that love him.

S E R M O N VI.

PSAL. cxxxix. 6.

*Whither shall I go then from thy spirit?
or whither shall I go then from thy pre-
sence?*

THIS Psalm is generally esteemed one of the noblest pieces of divine poetry that the world ever saw. The subject of it is no less than that of the infinite knowledge and presence of God; and the style is every way suitable to the subject. There is so much weight and dignity in the matter of it, that it cannot fail of forcing its way into the heart of every attentive reader; and there is too, such a life and energy in the expression of it, as is enough to rouse even the most inattentive one. It is almost impossible to read it as we ought, without some of the same spirit that we may suppose the holy Penman him-

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self was in at the time of composing it; and perhaps this single Psalm, duly inculcated and imprinted on our minds, would be more effectual towards raising in us a true and vigorous spirit of piety, than all the books of devotion that ever were written. How solemn and affecting is the address it begins with ! *O Lord, thou hast searched me out, and known me ; thou knowest my down sitting and mine uprising ; thou understandest my thoughts long before ; thou art about my path and about my bed, and spiest out all my ways. There is not a word in my mouth, but thou, O Lord, knowest it altogether.* Can a man thus address himself to God, the searcher of his heart, and yet dare, at the same time, to let any sin lurk there ? Can he venture to play the hypocrite before Him, to whose eyes he acknowledges all things are open ? Surely to reflect on this so inconceivable prerogative of God, is enough to cast any one down in the profoundest awe and veneration. It is impossible to consider this, and not go on with the Psalmist, and say,

say, *Such knowledge is too wonderful and excellent for me, I cannot attain unto it.* How must the sinner dread, and yet where can he hide himself, from such an all-seeing eye! Alas! all hopes of secrecy, all attempts of escape, must be vain; for as it goes on, *Whither shall I go then from thy spirit; or whither shall I go then from thy presence? If I climb up into heaven, thou art there; if I go down to hell, thou art there also. If I take the wings of the morning, and remain in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there also shall thy hand lead me; and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, peradventure the darkness shall cover me: then shall my night be turned to day. Yea the darkness is no darkness with thee, but the night is as clear as the day: the darkness and light to thee are both alike.* What an idea of God's majesty are we here presented with, to think, that could we be supposed to pass with ever so much swiftness from heaven to hell, from one extreme of nature to the other; that yet we should not be at all the

farther from Him: That He is subject to no alteration of time or place, as we are: That no distance can remove us, no darkness can screen us, from His sight: That there is no such thing as height or depth, with Him: That He is always near: That He is every-where present!

And that God is every-where present, we have not this passage alone, but the whole tenor of Scripture to justify. Thus, 1 Kings viii. 27. *Behold the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee.* Isa. lxvi. i. *Thus saith the Lord, behold heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool.* Jer. xxiii. 23, 24. *Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him, saith the Lord? do not I fill heaven and earth?* And to name but one passage more, out of the New Testament, Acts xvii. 27, 28. *Though he be not far from every one of us. For in him we live, and move, and have our being.* And indeed the immensity of the Deity is so necessary to the
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very being of a God, that where the one is admitted, the other cannot well be excluded. This we find the heathen authors, by the light of nature only, acknowledge; some calling God the soul passing through, and inspiring, all nature: Others, that nothing is void of God; that he fitteth his own work; Others, that he is every-where present; and the like. In short, without a belief of this attribute of the Deity, we can hardly conceive him to be either infinitely knowing, or infinitely powerful; nor consequently how either he should govern the world now, or judge it hereafter. Wherefore, not to multiply more proofs, in a case that seems too clear to stand in need of them, I shall take your belief of this great article for granted; and go on to consider what are the natural effects that it ought to have upon us.

And *first* then, it ought to possess us with the greatest admiration and reverence towards God; and with the meanest and humblest

opinions of ourselves, and of every thing else, in comparison of him.

It is certain that nothing usually affects the mind with more admiration, than the idea of any thing that is great. Every large object that nature presents to us, every huge rock, or precipice, or mountain that we see, is wont to raise in us some degree of wonder and astonishment; which astonishment is still the greater there, where the prospect is too unbounded for the eye to take it in; and where, after the sight has dropped it, our mind takes it up, and pursues it. It is thus we are so peculiarly struck with the prospect of the ocean; which appearing, of all objects, the largest to the senses of any, of any moveable object at least, is, for that reason, apt to affect them the most; and in proportion as it affects the senses, it affects the imagination also. We cannot but stand amazed at the consideration of so great an object as this; and can we stop there, without going farther to consider, how amazingly much greater then must

must be that whole, of which this is but a part! Should we go on still farther, to contemplate all the heavens, with the host thereof; could we measure the distance and magnitude of every star that shines there; how must it still open our imagination, and encrease our astonishment! Could we possibly help making this reflection upon it: If such is the wormanship, what must the great Author of it be! But after all, should we conceive this world to be ever so great; that every star were a sun, with its several planets, as this has, moving round it; yet if we acknowledge, as indeed who can deny, but that it has its bounds somewhere; what an insufficient idea, at last, must all this give us of the immensity of God? as insufficient a one, as we should form of the ocean from one drop only; or of the wole world, from a single atom. And could we think then of such a Being as this, and not revere, admire, and adore Him? How must all things lessen, in comparifon of Him? how mean and contempt-

ible all the world appear before Him? how trifling especially this earth, with all its several vanities of honours, riches, or pleasures, when set in opposition to Him? When we consider the infinite presence and perfections of God; what, of a sudden, becomes of all those petty advantages that distinguish men here; birth or fortune, rank or privilege, parts or power? Alas! they all vanish into nothing, as undistinguishable as the least spark at noon day, when the sun shines out in its full lustre. Consider men, the most considerable of them, with Him; and what are all their boasted excellencies, but so many imperfections? What is all their grandeur, but meanness? their strength, but weakness? their knowledge, but ignorance? And what, after this, can we find worthy to create in us either any envy against others, or any pride and arrogance in ourselves? Surely the contemplation of such a Being as this, is enough to swallow up all other considerations whatever.

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But the belief of this article is not to be matter of speculation only; no—it ought to have, and if considered with that attention it deserves, it must have, a thorough influence upon all our practice. For it is, *secondly*, the most powerful restraint upon vice, and the greatest encouragement to virtue, that can be imagined.

First, It is the most powerful restraint against vice, as it keeps up those two great principles of action, *shame* and *fear*, quick and vigorous in our minds, by stripping us of all vain hopes, either of *secrecy* or *impunity*. First, then, I say, it strips us of all hopes of *secrecy*, and so operates strongly on our shame.

That sin is contrary to reason and nature, is evident enough, if from the shame only that inseparably attends it. And this shame has sometimes so surprizing an effect on a man's whole behaviour, occasions so much disorder and confusion in all his words and actions, nay, in every look and gesture, that
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the man shall be sufficiently proclaimed a sinner to the whole world; at the same time that not a single person in it shall be able to charge him with any particular transgression; in which case, conscience serves as a thousand witnesses; and makes up the deficiencies of human laws, by stigmatizing the sinner in those instances, where no human law has been able to take cognizance of the sin. Nevertheless be the judgment of conscience how impartial soever, it is not always attended with these visible effects. Many a man, who, it is to be presumed, feels the severest pangs whenever cool and alone, may yet carry a fair outside, and cheat the world with a false show of joy and cheerfulness, which are the natural products of innocence alone. And besides that the effects of conscience are not always thus visible, it may too be often disturbed and interrupted in the discharge of its office. Though it acts ever so impartially whenever it does act; yet its power of acting may, by a thousand accidents, be suspended, or overruled.

ruled. In this case, the fear of worldly shame may, in some measure, come in to its aid, and prevent the sinner from many flagrant offences, which hardly any thing but that had restrained him from. There are those who make no scruple to commit any wickedness whatever, who yet affect all the caution and secrecy imaginable in the commission of it. Not the presence only of a great or a good man shall serve as a check to them in the pursuit of their favourite vices; even that of a child shall be able to do it; and be the temptation ever so strong, yet the awe of any witness shall overcome it. But how ineffectual a restraint the fear of worldly shame must prove, may be easily guessed, from the small extent of all worldly notice. What is the human eye at the best? how short is it in its reach? how precarious in its exercise? a thousand accidents may divert it; a thousand obstructions intercept it. Be the medium between that and its object either too dark or too bright, and the effect will be much the same,

same in both cases; it can see nothing at all in the one, and nothing distinctly in the other. Consequently in all those instances where the sinner can, or but thinks that he can, escape the notice of the world, there the fear of shame arising from that, will be little, or none at all. The sinner may indeed be with-held hereby from some outward acts of wickedness; but he will still be ready to execute it whenever an opportunity of secrecy shall present itself. It was no bad advice therefore of a famous heathen, when he would have us fancy a Cato or a Lælius continually before us, as eye-witnesses of all that we did. But after all, what effect would the presence of an imaginary, nay, or even of a real Cato or Lælius have, in comparison of that omnipresent Being we are speaking of? The constant inspection of the best and greatest men, nay, of the whole world, could it be supposed, would be only a check at best upon our actions; but notwithstanding we might be thus tied up from the

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commission of sin, our hearts would be still at liberty to project it. They are open to God alone, the searcher of hearts; and to Him indeed it is impossible but they should be open. Where there is an infinite presence, there, there must be an infinite knowledge too.

Some indeed (as it is too common for men to judge of the Divine Nature by their own) seeing variety is apt to be attended with distraction in themselves, have been but too ready to conclude it to be the same with God too; though if they had but considered, that it is so with them because they are finite, they must necessarily have concluded it could not be so with God, because he is infinite; the infinity of his nature making such an universal inspection into the whole world, with all the several parts and species belonging to it, as easy for Him, as an inspection into but one spot only, or a single individual. And shall we be ashamed then of doing that before men, which we yet venture to do before the

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Majesty of heaven? Shall we be more careful to avoid the reproach of our fellow-creatures than that of our great Creator? And yet, this we are, whenever we dare to act, or even to meditate on wickedness, merely because the eyes of men are off us; since in our darkest retirements God still is with us; *the darkness and light to him are both alike.* In short, let us consider but those reasons which are apt to awe us most with regard to men, and we shall find them still infinitely stronger with regard to God. Thus, is it the greatness, the wisdom, or the goodness of the person we are before, so that we are ashamed of doing a mean thing before a great man, a weak thing before a wise man, or a scandalous thing before a good man? and yet sin is, in its own nature, the basest, the weakest, and most scandalous thing in the world; and we can never act, or conceive it, but in the presence of a Being infinitely great, infinitely wise, and infinitely holy. Let us then but seriously think ourselves under the constant eye of God

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(as we certainly are, whether we will think so or no) and it is impossible but we must be restrained from the practice of vice, if from the *shame* only that must necessarily attend it.

But the belief of this article is still farther instrumental in preventing us from sin, as it strips us also of all vain hopes of *impunity*; and so operates strongly and vigorously on our *fears*: And we know that men will be influenced by them, when they will be influenced by nothing else. Even those who are lost to all sense of worldly shame, will yet be under some check from the dread of worldly punishment. But as the fear of worldly shame, so also the fear of worldly punishment, must prove a very ineffectual restraint upon sin; for wherever there may be secrecy, there may be impunity too. But now, besides that human laws can operate only on the actions of men, which yet may be ordered so privately as to escape their notice; so neither can they be worded so cautiously, as to exclude all
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doubt about the sense of them ; nor so comprehensively, as to take in all cases : Hence, many will be found cunning enough, in various instances, to evade them ; as there may be others of power enough, in some instances, to over-rule them. But now, as there is no escaping of God's notice, so is there no avoiding of his justice ; no resisting of his power. As, from the sovereignty of his nature, he must have an undoubted right to our absolute obedience, and so may impose what laws soever he pleases upon us ; so, from the rectitude of his nature, it will follow, that they must be every way wise and good ; fit for him to enjoin, and for us to perform ; and consequently, from the veracity of his nature, that the sanction of eternal punishments, by which he has enforced them, can be no idle menace ; but, in case of disobedience, will be as certainly executed, as threatened. This his holiness, this his justice, this his wisdom, and this his veracity, seem to require. And can it then be possible for us seriously to believe
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ourselves in the presence of, and yet at the same time dare to offend, so righteous a judge, so terrible an avenger?

The belief of this article is not a more effectual restraint against vice, than it is, lastly, an encouragement to virtue.

We know what a spur to action is the presence and applause of men only. Now our resolutions are wont to be strengthened, and our endeavours enforced, by the hopes of a little worldly reputation, or power, or interest. Ingenuous tempers will judge no pains too great, no labour too difficult, to arrive at excellence in any kind; especially where there are those of judgment to distinguish that excellence, and of generosity to reward it.

But what excellence is there, in any kind, comparable to that in virtue, which raises us as much above the brutes, and as near to a similitude of the Divine Nature, as it is possible for us to be? What are all the applauses or rewards which we can receive from men, in comparison of those which we may

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receive from God? from God, whose nature is such, that he cannot but be witness to our most retired virtue; and which, as he cannot but duly value, so will he not fail abundantly to reward. Could we once suppose God to be not every-where present, in case of any very pressing temptation, whether of terror or allurements, whether it strike on our fear or hope, or what other passion soever, our virtue would be apt to fail us: The pleasures of the world would too much soften us; the dangers of it too much dismay us. But now when we are conscious of the presence of an infinitely *wise, good, and powerful* Being; of *wisdom*, to know our true interest; of *goodness*, to intend it; and of *power*, to effect it; surely we may go on evenly and steadily in the practice of our duty, in spite of all the temptations and discouragements that can meet us in our way. Exclude God's presence from the world, and what a miserable thing must life be! What real content and satisfaction could all the advantages of health and strength, friends

friends and relations, power and affluence, afford us, when considered every moment at the mercy of ten thousand accidents, equally beyond our power either to foresee or prevent? But whoever believes a Providence, and lives according to that belief, is happy and secure against all events whatever. He knows, that though infinite dangers surround him, yet, if it so please God, not one shall approach to hurt him: Such a man, and such alone, may rationally lay him down in peace, and take his rest; for it is the Lord only that maketh, or that can make, him dwell in safety. Such an one has a constant benefactor at hand, to whom he may impart all his wishes, his wants, and his sorrows, with an humble confidence, that every pious prayer shall be granted; every reasonable wish be gratified; every affliction, in due time, be removed; or, if continued, continued not in wrath, but in mercy; with a due supply of the Divine Grace, for his comfort here; and a never-failing promise of

a participation of the Divine Glory, for his reward hereafter.

And now I might appeal to the vicious and prophane libertines, the scoffers of God and of all goodness, whether they have not their fits of melancholy and dejection? whether their gaiety be not rather forced and superficial, than natural and substantial; the effects of wine and company; and therefore apt to fail them then most, when they most stand in need of it, in their hours of reflection and retirement? It might be asked them, why, under penury, pain, sickness, or any pressing calamity whatsoever, they are generally so mean-spirited and dastardly, so restless and impatient, that they are even ready to snatch nature's work out of her hands, and to turn their own executioners? Is it not too apparent from hence, that they have lived all along under a total disregard of the Divine Presence; and so can now draw no comfort from the thoughts of it. In their prosperity, they forget God; and therefore can they take

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no refuge in Him in their adversity. Thus, too frequently do they end their days either despairing or blaspheming; wretched in their death; and still more wretched, that after death there will be a judgment.

But persons of this infamous rank are hardly to be met with in such assemblies as these: Wherefore I shall now profitably point my discourse to you that are present; and who, by being here, plainly show your belief of God's presence; or else, it were impious mockery your being here.

And now, to such of you as live in the notorious practice of any one or more sins, (as, alas! where is there a society without such?) I would ask you, how you can reconcile such a course with the belief of this article? For instance: How incongruous is it for any one to accustom himself rashly to swear by the same God whom he prays to? to profane the very Being he adores? Can he expect God to be a witness to his prayers, and not to his oaths and curses too? and that

those shall be granted, and yet these go unpunished?

As for those of you, if there are any such among you, who pretend to a stricter piety than others, who have all the form of godliness, without any thing of the power and substance of it; outwardly sanctified, but inwardly corrupt; I would ask you, whether you think God capable of being deceived as well as men? and that when he is called the Searcher of hearts, it is no more than an empty title? No; this it is impossible you can believe of God; if you really believe in Him at all. What then can your belief of Him signify with such an unsuitable practice? the one can only serve to condemn the other.

In a word then, and to conclude: That the belief of God's presence may have its due influence upon us, let us not be content with a transient reflection upon it now and then; but let us inure ourselves to think of it seriously and constantly; let it never, if possible,

sible, be absent from us ; so shall nothing be able either to allure or terrify us from our duty, but we shall go on evenly and securely under the comfortable guidance of God's grace in this life, till we pass into a state of everlasting happiness in the next ; even to that blessed place, where our faith shall be turned into fruition ; where we shall see God as He is ; be actually in possession of His glorious presence, where there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

able either to allure or terrify us from our
duty, but we shall go on in our journey
under the same guidance and assistance of
grace in our hearts, which was intended to
overcome our passions and desires for
bidden pleasures, which we shall be turned
into finitions, where we shall see God's
glory in the world, and the happiness of
heaven, the perfection of God's love, and
still for ever in the Father, which
the most enlarged human understanding can
never comprehend. Both in his word and in
his works, in his nature and in his providence,
there will be difficulties insuperable to us.
To find out the Almighty to perfection, to
be able to know God as he is, we had need
be as perfect and as knowing as He: that is,
in other words, be gods ourselves. To be
thus glorious belongs only to God, is his
proper prerogative, and is a more necessary

S E R M O N VII.

D E U T. xxix. 29.

*The secret things belong unto the Lord our God:
but those things which are revealed belong
unto us and our children for ever, that we
may do all the words of this law.*

SO limited are the capacities of man, and so infinite the perfections of God, that there will for ever be mysteries in the Deity, which the most enlarged human understanding can never comprehend. Both in his word and in his works, in his nature and in his providence, there will be difficulties insuperable to us. To find out the Almighty to perfection; to be able to know God as he is; we had need be as perfect and as knowing as He; that is, in other words, be gods ourselves. To be thus mysterious belongs only to God, is his peculiar prerogative; nor is it more necessary
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in nature, that so it must be, than in reason, that so it should be; nothing being more likely than this both to secure our humility and His majesty. Did He always act according to the ministration of second causes, we should be too apt to rest in them, without any regard to the first. Were things to go on always the same, they would grow familiar; and familiarity is the ready way to contempt. The sun, in all his glory, is not, by a thousand times, so much regarded, as the same sun in an eclipse; which can be only upon this account, that the one happens so seldom, and the other so frequent. Thus again, did the Scriptures contain in them nothing but what is plain and obvious to all capacities alike, where would then be that variety which now so admirably adapts them to each capacity in particular? There would then be *milk* indeed *for the weak*, but where would there be *meat for the strong*? What then would there be, either to employ our reason, or to exercise our faith? so that, if there are those,
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who are hardy enough to object against the Scriptures, because there are some things in them obscure, with much more colour might they object against them, were there nothing so. However, seeing that the *secret things* are affirmed here to *belong unto the Lord our God*; but these things *which are revealed unto us*, amongst which yet, since there are several things proposed to our belief, utterly inconceivable before they were revealed, and even now utterly inexplicable by us, it will become us to find out a proper criterion, whereby to distinguish them; to know what are the *secret things which belong to God alone*, and what are those which *belong to us*; and these, it is clear, from the latter part of my text, are such as are plainly revealed in Scripture, and have a direct influence upon our practice; and consequently whatever are not contained therein, or have no such tendency as hath been mentioned, we have no business to concern ourselves with; to pry into them, is to encroach upon God's prerogative. And this

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we shall be guilty of, if we are inquisitive either into things which can have no relation to us, or which, in their own nature, *must* be, or in God's wisdom were designed to be, secret to us: In which cases our curiosity is either *impertinent*, or *vain*, or *presumptuous*; can be of no possible use or service, but may prove of infinite *dishonour to God*, of irreparable *injury to our neighbour*, and of the most dangerous consequence *to ourselves*, both here and hereafter.

To consider then this curiosity, with regard to religious matters; and, *first*, in such cases as can no ways concern us to know, and so must our curiosity be *impertinent*. We all know the rebuke which our Saviour gave St. Peter; who, after his own death was signified to him, was inquisitive to know what would become of St. John likewise; *If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? follow thou me*, John xxi. 22. The same answer, in effect, might serve to all that are inquisitive after the same manner. What is it to thee

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how God shall dispose of this or that man; whether he shall be happy or miserable; live long, or die soon? It is sufficient for thee that thou knowest thine own duty; and employment enough will it be for thee to discharge it as thou oughtest. To go on still from private persons to kingdoms; how foolish would it be for us to be perplexing ourselves about the reasons why the true religion was so long confined to the single nation of the Jews? why the Gospel was published no sooner, and has spread no wider in the world? what laws they are to be tried by, who know not the Gospel; and how far those, who are strangers to the name of Christ, can be partakers of the merits of Christ? These, I say, are enquiries not to be gratified; and therefore not to be indulged. It is sufficient for us, that enjoy the light of the Gospel, to know, that we ought to live as in the light; as much excelling others in the practice of our duty, as we excel them in the knowledge of

of it; leaving others, in the mean time, to stand or fall to their own master.

Thus again: As to any enquiries about the day of judgment, when it shall be; and the exact nature of that future state of rewards and punishments consequent upon it; whether there shall be a local heaven or hell; and wherein the joys of the one, and the miseries of the other, shall particularly consist; it is enough for us, that the things themselves are certain; that we shall all one day be judged, and immediately enter upon a state of everlasting happiness or misery: But more than this is needless for us to know; and idle therefore to enquire after.

Thus again: As to the sublime doctrines of Christianity, the Trinity, and Incarnation; that three distinct persons should subsist in the same Divine Nature, and the Divinity and humanity be united in one person: As to these things being so, revelation is plain; and their truth therefore not to be questioned: But how they should be so, is a point of no
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concern to us to know; as tending neither to make us at all more virtuous here, or happy hereafter.

To name but one instance more : God must, from eternity, have foreknown everything; he otherwise could not be omniscient. Man must be free; he could not otherwise be accountable; so that God's eternal foreknowledge, and man's liberty, are both equally certain. How to reconcile them together, as it may be no easy matter for us to do; so neither would it be of any concern, if we would.

I have hitherto considered this curiosity as entirely useless to us; and so, at best, is it *impertinent* : I shall now consider it as, in the nature of things, incapabable of being satisfied; and so is it *vain*. In the first case, we act more like fools; but more like madmen, in the latter. And indeed this is the fate in most of the merely speculative points of religion, that there is hardly being the one, without being the other too. What would
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that man seem, that should attempt to count all the sands upon the shore, or to hold all the ocean in the hollow of his hand? A yet more absurd attempt is it, if possible, for finite to grasp infinite; for man, the being of a day, to comprehend God, who is from eternity to eternity. How can we pretend to pronounce upon God's government of the world, who know so small a part of it, and even that too so very imperfectly? How can we penetrate into the mysteries of the Divine Nature, when we are such strangers to our own; when even the nature of every thing we see is such a mystery to us? Let us first explain how our souls and bodies mutually operate on each other, and what is the tie that holds them together; and then let us endeavour to show how the Divinity and humanity could be united in the person of Christ. These, and all other such speculations as these, we have now no faculties to conceive: They may perhaps be revealed to us in the next life; but we are incapable of receiving them in
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this: These are depths not for mortals to fathom: These are enquiries beyond the reach of reason, and therefore not the proper objects of it; nor tend they so much to enlarge our ideas, as to confound them.

But these abstruse points are not only such as are, in their own nature, undiscoverable by us; and so is our curiosity *vain*: But they are also such as God, in his wisdom, designed should be secret to us; and so will our curiosity appear bold and *presumptuous*. If we look into the world, we shall hardly find any thing more warmly resented, than an intemperate curiosity of prying into other men's affairs. Every one will tell you, that his thoughts are his own; and that he will suffer no man to be master of his mind but himself. Even in common life, and among equals too, this resentment is to be found; so that should any one be diving too far into another's breast, he would deservedly meet the rebuke of invading an office that does not belong to him. If then this usage is unwarrantable among equals,

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how much more must it be from inferiors to their superiors? from a servant to his lord, or a subject to his prince? How much more then from man to the great King of kings, and Lord of lords!

Clouds and darkness are round about him; and for very wise reasons are they so, to keep the creature at an awful distance from the Creator; to give us truer notions of our meanness, and of His majesty; to mortify our pride, and to exercise our faith. And shall we then do what in us lies to defeat the purposes of the Almighty? Shall we dare prophanely approach, where he has commanded us to stand at distance and adore? Shall we entertain so high an opinion of ourselves, and such mean notions of God, as still to follow the suggestions of the old serpent, and affect to be gods ourselves? Shall those very mysteries, which were intended as mortifications of our pride, become fresh incentives to it, and be made the objects of our reason, which were meant only for the exercise of our faith? For shame!

shame! let us not imagine so vain a thing; let us never *take counsel together against the Lord, lest he that dwelleth in heaven should laugh us to scorn, lest the Lord should have us in derision, lest he should speak unto us in his wrath, and vex us in his sore displeasure.* Such a presumption as this, or nothing else, is enough to draw down the Divine vengeance upon us; nor, if we consider what dishonourable notions it tends to give us of *God*, and what irreparable injuries it is likely to occasion our *neighbour*, will it appear at all strange, if it should be attended with the most dangerous consequences to *ourselves*, both here and hereafter.

First, such a presumption tends to give us very unworthy notions of God. I believe it may be laid down for a rule, that as much time as is spent in the merely speculative points, so much is taken from the practical and more substantial parts of Christianity; and generally too great an attention to the former, is apt to breed a contempt of the latter,

latter, as of things of an inferior nature, and fitted only for lower capacities : So that dividing Christianity into matters of belief and practice, its mysteries and its precepts, such a man shall throw aside these, as beneath his notice; and those will he find, upon trial, to be above his conception. And now what will be the consequence of this? why, having no bottom to fix upon, but being tossed about from one absurdity to another, he will come, at last, to charge his own inconsistencies upon the doctrines themselves; to look upon them as of no service to man, and so unworthy of God; the next step to which, is to deny their being revealed by God.

Nor do the effects of this presumption end here : Those arrows which we idly aimed at the Almighty, do a great deal of hurt to mankind in their fall. Ill example is of a very spreading nature; and it is easy to make profelytes to vice. There is a curiosity to know implanted in us all; and the being called slaves to received opinions, is enough

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to rouse the love of liberty with us. By this means, others are tempted to pursue the same methods, and with the same success. Thus, from fixed principles of action, they come to float about in endless uncertainties; believing less, and living worse, every day than another; till at last, infidelity and immorality carry away whole multitudes, in defiance of the laws both of God and man; and to the manifest detriment of every thing that is either *sacred* or *civil* amongst us.

And is it a wonder then that it should be of so dangerous a consequence to *ourselves*? it is reasonable to expect it should, both upon a *natural* and a *judicial* account. We may perplex ourselves with obscurities so long, till we shall perceive nothing clearly; as a man may confine himself to the dark, till the light itself shall be painful to him. By puzzling ourselves too much about God's *secret* will, we may become strangers at last even to his *revealed* one, and may dispute about the great mysteries of Christianity, till we begin to

doubt of the very first principles of all religion, the belief of a God, and a Providence. These, I say, we may be brought to doubt of; but we can never confute: So that we shall still be subject to all the calamities of life, at the same time that we have nothing left to support us under them; have all the fears, but none of the hopes, of a future state. We shall perhaps have thrown aside the comfortable doctrine of the Divine Grace, merely because we cannot account for the manner in which it is communicated; and have forfeited all claim to the benefit of a Redeemer, because we cannot comprehend the mysterious doctrine of God incarnate. Thus shall we bring ourselves into the most deplorable condition that may be; full of doubts and fears while we live; and perhaps blaspheming and despairing when we come to die. Alas! this is not the worst: If we have no hopes in Christ here, we can have no benefits from him hereafter. Nothing but misery

fery can then be our portion ; misery intolerable, and irretrievable.

I have now pretty largely considered what are the *secret things which belong unto the Lord*; and they are such, as whether relating to his nature, his word, or his providence, are either what no-ways concern us to know ; or what, in our present condition, cannot, or God, in his wisdom, intended *should* not, be known by us : So that our curiosity is always idle and *impertinent*, and generally *vain* and *presumptuous* too ; tending greatly to the dishonour of God, and the prejudice of mankind : And no wonder therefore if, as well *judicially* as *naturally*, of the most dangerous consequence to our own interest, temporal and eternal.

It is time that I now proceed to enquire what are the things which belong unto us : And they are such as are plainly revealed, and have a direct influence upon our practice, according to the latter words of the text, *but the things which are revealed belong unto us and*

our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.

It is evident from every page almost of Scripture, that God regards not the speculative, but the practical, Christian. In his account, there is no wisdom like that of obedience; no true philosophy but that of a good life. It is no where said, Happy are ye, if ye know these things; but, *if ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them*, John xiii. 17. Since then a life of holiness is so universally and wholly our concern, as that the tendency to this end is made the criterion to judge of all other things by, whether they belong to us or not; it will be proper briefly to examine some of the chief articles of Christianity by this rule, and see how far they are subservient to this design.

And to begin with that which seems to have the least tendency thereto, the doctrine of the Trinity. Now when we find this so plainly revealed in Scripture, and therefore necessarily true; and yet, how it should be, is so
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utterly beyond our power to conceive; what, I say, can be more effectual than this to cast down all vain imaginations of our own wisdom? what more effectual to convince us of the shortness of our capacities, and the infinite perfections of the Divine Nature, than this, that, be our attainments in knowledge ever so great, yet there is an infinite fund of knowledge still behind, which it is impossible for our most enlarged faculties, in this life, ever to attain to? Surely this must teach us never to think of God, but with reverence; nor of ourselves, but with the greatest modesty and diffidence; and consequently the belief of this article will be of use to morality as long as pride is a vice, and humility a virtue.

Again, as to the incarnation: How two such distinct natures as the divine and human could be united together in the same person, were as needless as it is impossible for us to conceive; but when we find it so plainly revealed in Scripture that they were so united

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in Christ, what notions must it give us of such an infinite condescension? We surely can never think of it as we ought, but at the same time we must admire and adore it. When we consider farther, that this infinite condescension was for our sakes and for our advantage; our hearts must needs burn within us; and when the fire is kindled, our tongues must speak. This, or nothing else, will bind our duty upon us, from the noblest principles of love and gratitude. Shall we think the best requital we can make, too much for such a benefactor? Shall we think any obedience too difficult which he has enjoined us in his law; or any office too mean which he has honoured by his example? Surely we can do nothing too much in return to Him, or to our brethren, for his sake, and upon his account. And has the doctrine then of Christ's incarnation, no reference to a good life? yes, surely it has, and always must have, while there are such duties in the world as piety to God, and charity to our neighbour.

Again,

Again, as to the satisfaction for sin, which Christ made by the sacrifice of Himself, though the particular reasons thereof may be incomprehensible to us, yet can we say the doctrine itself has no relation to practice? What could serve to manifest God's hatred to sin, and love to the sinner; to display his justice and his mercy at the same time, so effectually as this? When we find the malignity of sin to be such, that nothing less than the blood of the Son of God could expiate it; what an indignation and abhorrence of it must this needs raise in us! Who, that considers this as he ought, would venture to crucify the Son of God afresh, by repeating it? Again, when we find our Saviour so willingly submitting to the punishment of sin, who was so entirely free from the guilt of it; submitting to it for our sakes, and in our steads; surely we must be absolutely savage or insensible, before we can be ungrateful under such obligations. It is almost impossible to see so bright and perfect an example, without admir-

admiring it ; or to admire it, without endeavouring to copy it.

Farther, as to the doctrine of God's grace — Scripture is silent, both as to the measure and manner of its operation ; and therefore we may presume they are not needful, if possible, to be known ; nor too curiously therefore to be pried into. But as to the thing itself, that God is always ready with such a supply of his grace as is wanted, the Scripture is plain, and consequently our belief of it necessary. Nor is our belief of this article at all more necessary than it is useful ; for let a man's afflictions be ever so great, or his temptations ever so pressing ; yet let him but be actuated by this persuasion, and he will maintain his integrity in the midst of them all. This will never suffer him to drop his hopes, or slacken his endeavours, because he is taught to expect God's help, in proportion as he exerts his own ; and as he is sure of the Divine aid on this condition ; so is he sure also, that while God is on his side, not all the powers

powers of darkness shall be able to prevail against him. In short, this principle will not only make him superior to all the calamities of life, but even to death itself; and it is hard to find any other rational principle that will,

It were easy to run over the rest of the articles of the Christian faith, and to show how the belief of them all severally conduces to the same common end, namely, the support, advancement, and perfection of morality; but that I may not be too tedious, I shall leave these for the exercise of your private thoughts, and hasten to conclude, with an inference or two, such as the times particularly require, and the subject naturally suggests.

First, then, we are from hence clearly taught how foolish and impious it is to pretend to be wise above what is written; and to endeavour to explain those things which are, in their own nature, inexplicable. It is from this intemperate curiosity of diving into
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the counsels of the Almighty; this absurd notion, that human reason is the measure of all truth, that the Church of Christ has been infested with heresies, from all ages down to this present time; and is, at this present time, perhaps more infested, than in any age before: For when was this principle more fondly espoused, or zealously maintained, than now? Tell a modern Deist, that such a thing is revealed by God, and therefore to be believed; yet this has no weight with him, unless he himself can comprehend it. It is to no purpose to say, that it is, and was, designed to be above his reason; for that is, in his account, to be contrary to reason. All faith passes with him for superstition, and every mystery for an absurdity; and therefore because he cannot solve some few parts of Scripture, he wisely will admit of none: As if there were no knowledge in the Almighty which could surpass human understanding; or that finite and infinite were the same thing.

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But that there are mysteries in Christianity, and that for very wise reasons they are so, viz. to improve and strengthen every moral virtue, I hope I have, in the course of my subject, sufficiently proved; and therefore, to my last inference, by way of *caution and reproof*, let me add one other, by way of *exhortation*; and that is, that we receive them with all imaginable humility and reverence; acquiescing in the bare revelation of the things themselves, and in those express terms in which they are revealed; for so far only *belong they unto us and to our children for ever, as tending to make us better able to do all the words of the law*; but if we go farther than this, we are in danger of invading the Divine prerogative, and of prying into the *secret things which belong only to the Lord our God*. Let us not be ashamed then to submit our reason to Him, who is infinitely good, and therefore *will not deceive others*; who is infinitely wise, and therefore *cannot be deceived himself*. This is true policy, this is true wisdom; nay, this is,

is, whatever some men may think to the contrary, true morality too ; for when once God has revealed a thing to be so, in that case for us to *believe* is to obey, and *faith* itself a *moral virtue*.

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S E R M O N VIII.

JOHN ix. 1, 2, 3.

And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth. And his disciples asked him, saying, Master, who did sin, this man, or his parents, that he was born blind? Jesus answered, Neither hath this man sinned nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

IN the behaviour of the disciples to the poor distressed man in this passage, we have a very lively picture of the treatment which the unfortunate are too apt to meet with; who, as if it was not enough for them to be afflicted beyond others, have their afflictions often embittered by unkind censures, and their calamities interpreted into judgments. How unreasonable this proceeding is, may be learnt from our Saviour's answer to the disciples in

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this place, that *neither hath this man sinned nor his parents: but that the works of God should be made manifest in him*; an answer which, as it silenced them, so ought it to silence all others that presume to judge in the like manner; for if they might be so mistaken, as we find they were, it can surely be no wonder that others may be mistaken too. That God does sometimes indeed visit for sin, is not to be denied; experience and history both witnessing to the truth of it. To this was plainly owing the destruction of the old world by the deluge, and of Sodom by fire and brimstone. And, with respect to nations, which, as such, can be only punished in this world, both the cause and the effect of God's anger are many times but too visible. A man must be blind, not to see God's judgment upon the whole Jewish people; nor can any one, who has read the account of our Saviour's death, be at all to seek from whence that judgment arose. Nor is it always obscure, even with regard to private persons, as in the
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case of Elymas the forcerer, of Adonibezeck, Herod, Ananias, and some others whom the Scriptures mention. And some other examples no doubt there are to be met with, where God's vengeance has been too plain possibly to be mistaken, where the sin has been legible, as it were, in the punishment. But as to God's extraordinary visitations for sin, whether on the person of the sinner himself, or on his posterity, upon his account, together with the reasons and justice of such a proceeding, I shall not now take upon me to enquire; I shall rather consult the general drift of the place, and show, from our Saviour's answer here in my text, that we are not generally judges when men are thus extraordinarily visited; and that we certainly have no authority to conclude them so, from any common calamities of life which they may be subject to. And this will easily be granted, when we shall have considered the falleness of the *principle* which such a judgment proceeds from.

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from, and the dangerous *consequences* which it naturally draws after it.

I. The principle which such a judgment goes upon, is this; that afflictions are the sure signs of God's displeasure; and consequently, since nothing can be displeasing to God but sin, that the greatest sufferers are therefore the greatest sinners. In opposition to which, I shall show, *first*, from Scripture, That afflictions are no such certain marks of God's displeasure, as they are, in this case, supposed to be. *Secondly*, from reason, That neither is there any necessity they should. And, *thirdly*, I shall assign other better causes which men's afflictions may be resolved into.

First, then, I shall endeavour to prove, that afflictions are no such sure marks of God's displeasure as such a judgment supposes them to be; which if I can make out, the consequence built upon that supposition must, of course, fall with it. Now, that they are not, is plain from many express texts and examples in Scripture. Thus, *Heb. xii. 6.*

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Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth. Thus, Pf. lxxiii.

5. David says of the wicked, *that they come in no misfortune like other folk, neither are they plagued like other men;* and of himself, in the fourteenth Psalm, *All the day long have I been punished, and chastened every morning.* It is needless to multiply more texts, since these are so full to the purpose. For is it not evident, from hence, that those who are the most odious in God's sight, as the wicked necessarily must be, pass many times without any remarkable affliction at all; while those, on the contrary, who are the best men, and whom therefore God loves most, are oftentimes the most afflicted? Let the wiseman's conclusion therefore be ours, that *no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before him,* Eccles. ix. 1.

But besides these express texts, what a cloud of witnesses does Scripture furnish us with? What a world of examples of men the most eminent, as well for their sufferings

as their virtues? Look upon Job, on the dunghill; Joseph, in the wilderness; consider that large catalogue recorded in Heb xi. *who had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea moreover of bonds and imprisonments, who were stoned, were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword, who wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented; and of whom yet it is said, in the very next words, that the world was not worthy.* Consider the glorious company of the apostles, and the noble army of martyrs; consider these, and then say, Must they necessarily be the greatest sinners, who are the greatest sufferers? Or, if all these examples are insufficient, consider, lastly, our Saviour himself, absolutely the greatest sufferer, yet without sin.

Thus you see that afflictions are no such marks of God's displeasure, as they are, in this case, supposed; nor, *secondly*, is it necessary they should; for neither is this life a

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state of retribution, nor are such afflictions an adequate punishment for sin.

Were there no life after this, then indeed would sin be as certainly punished as committed here, and the greater the sin, the sorer would the punishment be; but since this world is only a state of probation for another, it is no matter what seeming irregularities there may be now, if they are all sure to be set right hereafter. If then the righteous may very well be involved in the same calamities with the wicked, or be exercised even with sharper than they, without any impeachment of God's justice; how rash must it be for any one to pronounce sentence before the day of trial, and to venture to condemn him, whom perhaps God, before the face of men and angels, shall acquit at the last day.

But neither are the greatest temporal sufferings an adequate punishment for sin; for *the wages of sin*, as the Apostle tells us, is *death*, eternal death. And the reason of this is plain; for since it is the soul of man

chiefly that sin; it is the soul chiefly that should suffer; but in all temporal calamities, it is the body chiefly that is affected. Besides, the punishment of the sinner ought to be commensurate to the duration of the sin; but here again, as no temporal calamities are, by any means, proportioned to the nature of the soul, as being spiritual, so much less are they to its duration, as being eternal. You see then how uncertain our judgment of any one's future condition must needs be from all that can appear at the present. But supposing we could perceive a man marked out for eternal destruction, yet would not such an one's condition be miserable enough in the next world, but we must antedate his misery for him? Would not hell be a portion dreadful enough for him when it comes, unless by our harsh censures and treatment of him, we make earth, as it were, a hell to him in the mean time?

Alas! if God should be thus extreme to mark what is done amiss, as constantly to inflict sin

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with its punishment here; then how could they themselves, how indeed could any escape, since all have sinned; so true is it, that no man was ever yet a sufferer, but he was first a sinner; sinner enough to justify God in inflicting what temporal sufferings soever he pleased; though it by no means follows from thence, that every particular suffering must needs imply some particular sin for its cause. In short, man is born to affliction, as the sparks fly upward; and calamities are the common lot of mortality, which happen to good and bad men promiscuously. Now that, surely, which all men are subject to alike, ought not to be made a mark of reprobation in any. And we shall be the less apt to think so, when we shall, in the next place, have considered, what other much better and wiser reasons men's afflictions may be imputed to.

First, then, Providence many times sends one calamity only to prevent a greater, and who would think that a judgment upon any one, that he should, by chance, break a limb

at the setting out on his journey, when, but for that prevention, he had certainly lost his life upon the road? Oftentimes that which seems to threaten a man's ruin, may providentially be designed as the very means and occasion of his advancement. Look upon Moses, exposed in the bulrushes, and Joseph, sold by his brethren, and the case of either looks pitiable and deplorable enough; and yet, upon examination, you will find, that all their future greatness depended upon these unpromising beginnings. I dare say, as uncommon as these examples may seem, that every man's experience, who will but reflect upon his life impartially and attentively, may trace in it many occurrences of the same kind, though not to so extraordinary a degree as these. Many a man, upon a careful recollection of those circumstances, which seemed to him the most severe and grievous at the time, may be afterwards able to say, it is from such a misfortune that I date my present prosperity; to such or such an accident that I owe my
very

very life. We see then how absurd it is to form a rash judgment upon any affliction, that may produce so much comfort in the issue. But supposing sudden death itself to be inflicted; yet, are there no cases where even sudden death would be a blessing? To a good man, to one prepared to die, it is always so; and would not such an one, do you think, (with submission ever to God's will) choose rather to have his life cut off at once, than spun out to the last thread only, that he may survive the ruin of his friends, his family, or his country? And shall that then which may be sometimes even a good man's choice, and is, whenever it happens, a blessing to him, be at random pronounced upon by us as a judgment and a curse?

2. Another reason for temporal afflictions may be for the prevention of sin; which considered either in itself, or its consequences, is one of the greatest calamities a man can groan under; a prevention therefore from which must be one of the greatest mercies that God can

can bestow. Thus St. Paul *had his thorn in the flesh*; to the intent, as he himself tells us, *that he might not be exalted above measure*. Thus, should it please God to *cut off our right hand, or to pluck out our right eye*; to deprive us of any one or more of our limbs, that he should foresee would prove the instruments of vice; yet would not that, as dreadful as it may seem, be a blessing, rather than a punishment? for surely it is more profitable for us, that any one or more of our members should perish, *and not that our whole body should be cast into hell*. Adversity oftentimes checks those sins, which pampered prosperity is apt to give growth to. The voluptuous epicure, who, with the means of his lusts and intemperance still in his possession, had slid on insensibly to ruin, may, by Providence's depriving him of the means, be snatched like a firebrand out of the fire; may, by some seasonable affliction, be brought to consideration; by consideration, to repentance; and by repentance, to happiness. Many, who from
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finding every thing almost at their will, have begun to think every thing almost in their power too, so as to forget even the Lord who made them, God hath, by a merciful chastisement, taught to have a truer sense of their own weakness, and to take a surer refuge in his protection.

But, *thirdly*, the general design of afflictions is to make trial of a man; to the intent that the works of God may be made manifest in him; not perhaps by a miraculous deliverance from them, as by giving sight to the blind, the miracle recorded in the passage from whence my text is taken; but to exemplify to the world the power of the Divine Grace to support him under them. Then is our faith and confidence in God most eminently to be seen, when our circumstances are such, that we can have no confidence in any thing besides him. Many of the brightest of the Christian graces would lie, in a great measure, hid, did not some calamity or other give them an opportunity to display themselves;

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and adversity serves but as a shade to set them off to the greater advantage. True fortitude can never be made so conspicuous, as by what it endures; and that virtue which can pass the furnace unhurt, must needs be sterling. When a man has been able to part with every thing that is nearest and dearest to him, without murmuring; and to bear whatever is most sharp and grievous, without repining; perfectly resigned to God's will, and firmly relying upon his Providence; then may he be said to have best manifested his integrity to the world; and, what is still more immediately his concern, to his own conscience. Thus was Job, thus were many of the prophets, thus were the apostles and first martyrs of the church exercised, to convince mankind, that there are no difficulties so great, but what faith may overcome; that there can be no reproach or disgrace but must vanish, as it were, into nothing, before the hope of the glory which shall be revealed. Thus afflictions, you see, may have their bright, as well

as their dark side, and may be so far from being the marks of God's displeasure, that they may be the proofs and pledges of his love; in making those, whom he afflicts, his chosen instruments of doing most glory to Him, and benefit to mankind; to their own comfort and peace of mind here, and their unspeakable bliss and happiness hereafter.

II. Enough has been said to show the weakness of the *principle*, which such a rash way of judging proceeds from; it is time that I now hasten to show the bad *consequences* of it; for such they will appear to be, whether regarding God, our neighbour, or ourselves.

First, then, I say, it tends to give us very unworthy notions of God; for whosoever makes afflictions the constant marks of God's displeasure, must, by parity of reason, make prosperity as sure a sign of God's favour; and consequently as, in the one case, he may arraign some of the most eminent saints for the vilest sinners; so, in the other, he must place some of the vilest sinners in the rank of the
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most eminent saints. At this rate, Lazarus's contempt, poverty, and disease were but the just consequences of his sin; and the rich man's fine linen and sumptuous fare, the due reward of his virtue. But this is an opinion not only so contradictory to Scripture, but even to common sense and experience, that its absurdity confutes itself; for though afflictions can be no certain signs of a man's sin, and therefore none of God's displeasure; yet it may not be hard to find among the most prosperous, many who are the most vicious too, who abuse their high rank and fortune into a privilege of sinning with a higher hand, and after a more insolent manner. What then can be inferred from this? that God will punish that sin in one, which he will suffer even to be rewarded in another? that be far from God to do, and as far from us to think it of him. And yet, if we are to pass sentence upon men, from their outward conditions in this life, without taking the other into the account, such must the consequence
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needs be. God must be a respecter of persons; and now judge ye, whether to think thus unworthily of God, be not almost as bad as to think there is no God at all: Indeed they are, in effect, the same thing.

2. Such is the consequence of this rash way of judging, with relation to God; let us next see what will be the consequence of it, with regard to our neighbour. Now he who can once bring himself to conclude a man the certain object of God's wrath, may easily persuade himself, that neither ought he to be the object of his charity. And thus, at last, he may come to have no room to exercise his charity at all; because there will be no object left for him to exercise it upon: for if afflictions are thus to be interpreted into judgments upon this or that man in particular, why not as well upon all the afflicted in general? Perhaps it may be said, that some have been notorious sinners before their sufferings; and that therefore it may well be presumed, that their sin was the cause of them.

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But to this it may be replied, is there a necessity that sin should always be punished here, or not? If not, then there can be no cause of our judging at all; if there is, then that, which should induce this necessity, would make it as necessary also, that none but sinners should be sufferers, and consequently that all who suffer remarkably, have sinned heinously too, only with this difference, that some may have concealed their sin more artfully than others have done. At this rate therefore, whom will he have to exercise his compassion or benevolence upon? since all the prosperous are excluded, as not needing it; and all the unfortunate, as not deserving it.

3. Let us consider, lastly, how this way of judging will affect a man's self. Now if, among the vicissitudes of human life, afflictions should befall him in his turn, (and who can promise himself an exemption from them?) he must, consistently with his own notions, immediately conclude himself an outcast of God; and the world, from his
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former behaviour to them, will be but too apt to conclude him so too : And thus, being bereft of all comfort from God, and having no reason to expect any pity from men, he will naturally either sink down in despair, or fly out into blasphemy. Such is like to be his condition in this life : And God knows it is miserable enough ! But, (alas!) what then will be his condition in the next ? How will he be able to answer these questions at the last great day ? Whom hast thou seen naked, and hast cloathed him ? hungry, and hast fed him ? afflicted, and hast comforted him ? distrest, and hast relieved him ? How will he then look when he shall find, that those acts of charity and benevolence which he has omitted, are made, next to Christ's merits, the best title to God's favour ; and that blessed above all are the merciful ; for that they chiefly shall obtain mercy ? What confusion must he be in, to see many of those very persons, whom he hath presumptuously arraigned and condemn-

ed before men and angels, honourably acquitted, and everlastingly rewarded? How will he then wish for the hills to fall on him, and the mountains to cover him? for what can he, who hath shewed no mercy in judging others, what, I say, can he himself expect, but judgment without mercy? How inexpressible must his anguish needs be, when he hears himself included in that dreadful sentence, *Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire*; his own conscience, at the same time, pronouncing the sentence just?

To conclude therefore, with a recapitulation of the whole.

Is such a judgment as I have been speaking of, built upon a principle manifestly false? Does Scripture, both in express words, and by many eminent examples, declare, that afflictions are no such marks of God's displeasure as the case supposes them to be? And does reason farther convince us, that it is not necessary they should? On the contrary, does not Providence sometimes send one calamity,
only

only to prevent a greater? many times, to prevent sin, the greatest calamity we can be subject to in this life? and generally to manifest our virtue, to the greater glory of God, and good of mankind, as well as to our own peace of mind now, and the increase of our future happiness?

Are the consequences likewise of such a judgment as dangerous as its principle is false? does it tend to give us notions very unworthy of God, and very uncharitable to our neighbour? And, lastly, if any afflictions should befall us in our turn, does it naturally tend to make us either despair under them, or blaspheme upon the account of them; being bereft of any just expectation of pity from men, or mercy from God? Let us then, for God's sake, for our own sakes, let us check all ill-natured reflections that may arise in us, from observing the misfortunes of our brethren; let us pity, let us comfort, but let us never condemn them. Let us not act so injuriously to ourselves, as to judge uncharitably

of others. O let us be, as far as it is possible for us to be, in every thought, word and deed, merciful to all men, as we ever hope, through Christ's merits, to obtain mercy!

To whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, three persons and one God, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, adoration, and praise, for ever and ever.

Amen.

S E R M O N IX.

P A R T I.

H E B. iii. 13.

*Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day,
lest any of you be hardened through the deceit-
fulness of sin.*

WHoever considers either the nature or the consequences of sin, must needs be at first amazed, how any one should venture upon the commission of it. There is so much baseness inseparably attending it, as that it can never be eligible upon its own account; and so dreadful are the effects of it, as one would think it could never become so upon any other account whatsoever. Nothing can approve itself to the choice of a rational creature, but what is founded on reason; whereas sin is absolutely contrary to reason. Nothing can be a man's reasonable aim, but what is, some way or other, conducive to his happiness;

whereas sin naturally tends to his everlasting destruction ; consequently the judgment must be imposed upon, before it can make so absurd a choice. There must necessarily be some arts of deceit used, to reconcile us to sin ; it must insinuate itself under false colours, for it could never be agreeable in its own. It shall be the business then of my present discourse, to lay open the several fallacies whereby we are brought into sin at first, and afterwards confirmed in the habit of it ; that so being apprised of the wiles of Satan, we may, by the grace of God, be the better enabled to defeat them.

First, then, I shall consider those arts by which sin usually makes its entrance upon us ; and the *first* of these that I shall mention, is, by its putting on the mask and appearance of virtue.

There is something in virtue so agreeable to our nature, and in vice something so contrary to it, as that the eyes of our reason must be strangely blinded indeed, if we do not
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naturally affect the one, and abhor the other. As long as there are such things as truth and falshood in the world, so long will truth be honourable, and falshood contemptible. Chastity and temperance will for ever be amiable; lust and intemperance for ever odious. In short, there can be no virtue without its beauty; no vice without its deformity; and consequently the first must be always desirable, the latter always detestable. Such, I say, must the consequence needs be, while we consider virtue and vice as they are in themselves, or as they are contradistinguished the one from the other. But the misfortune is, that as there is no virtue but what has some vice bordering upon it; so they are but too apt to be confounded together, and the one therefore to be mistaken for the other. Thus when the tempter first persuades a man to be covetous, he does it not by pleading in behalf of avarice; no, the more effectually to compass his design, he conceals it; and whatever his intention may be, frugality is his

his theme: And thus, by leading the man on by degrees to the very extremity of the virtue, he carries him insensibly over to the vice that is nearest it. And thus the poor man shall perhaps still think himself but frugal, long after he is grown monstrously covetous.

Again, is another of a free and generous disposition? that may be a handle to lead him on to profuseness and extravagance. From a heart always well inclined to charity, he may be apt too often to be betrayed into an indiscreet exercise of it, so as neither sufficiently to consider the objects that ask his relief, nor the fund from which he is to supply them. And thus may he injure himself, without doing much good to others; and in time come to want the very alms he bestows. Nay, it has been sometimes known, that a man, by his ill-conducted bounty, has ruined not only himself, but his family; those who had a right to his care and protection; and so been led on, step by step, under a false

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notion of benevolence, to the highest degree of injustice.

Has another a natural warmth and fervency in his temper? then shall his zeal for religion, if not managed with great caution, serve as a snare, in the hands of the tempter, to transport him into bigotry and enthusiasm. On the contrary, is another of a colder constitution? let him beware then, lest his moderation in religious matters do not degenerate into too cool an indifference about them.

In these, and other the like cases, the temptation strikes in with each man's particular bent and constitution, and is therefore the more powerful; it represents sin under the appearance of virtue, and is therefore the more insinuating.

2. Another way whereby we are deceived into sin, is, by the many popular names and notions that prevail in the world. Virtue is never so happy as to have the majority on its side; and therefore whosoever is resolved to maintain it, must dare to appear now and then

then a little singular in its defence. He must be prepared to meet the scoffs and reproaches of those about him, who will always be ready to ridicule the virtues they care not to practise, and to put a good gloss and colour on whatever vices are in vogue; so that still the worse the thing, the better shall be the name to set it off: And therefore if a man once comes to make common fame the measure of his actions, it is impossible for him to know to what heights of sin and impiety he may at length be brought.

For instance: There is something in revenge so mean, in murder something so horrid, that nature is apt to start at the very thoughts or mention of either; and yet, let a quick resentment of affronts once pass in the world for a nice sense of honour, and to revenge them be reckoned an indication of courage, and a way will soon be made easy to both. Many a one has been thus tempted to make a sacrifice of his life and his conscience; and has actually proved himself a
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bravo to God, rather than he would be but suspected only as a coward by men.

In this case, as in those mentioned under my last head, you may observe, that sin makes its first advances in the guise and appearance of virtue; for undoubtedly a modest diffidence of one's self, and a proper deference to the judgment of others, is a quality highly commendable; but then, however the cases may, as to their rise and beginning, be pretty much the same, they are, in their growth and progress, very different; for it is no ways improbable that a man may be very far gone in avarice or profuseness, and the like, before he is aware of their sinfulness; nay, and may flatter himself that he is but exercising the contrary virtues of frugality or charity. But here the crime becomes soon too glaring to be concealed; for let people call things by what names they please, yet I dare say that no man ever went about coolly and deliberately to take away another's life, at the hazard of his own, upon any pretended punctilio
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of honour, but he was convinced of the folly and impiety of the attempt; and would, were it not out of a false shame, and fear of the reproaches of the world, have been heartily glad to decline it; so that, in the former instances, men may sin, as it were, without judgment; but in this, they are brought to sin directly against it.

3. Another way whereby we are apt to be led into sin, is, by too implicitly making another's example our rule. Could we find a man every way perfect, then indeed something might be said for it; but, alas! the wisest too often errs in his judgment; the best too often deviates in his practice; so that of the wisest, you can only say, that he is less foolish; of the best, that he is less bad than other men are. And yet how common is it to see men do, if not what they are persuaded is wrong, yet, at least, what they are doubtful whether it be right or no, merely because another confessedly wise and good man has done it before them. But at this rate, scarce
any

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any crime can be mentioned, but some great name or other may stand charged with it; and therefore whosoever once ventures upon any sin on this pretence, may, upon the same, be emboldened, by degrees, to commit almost all sins whatsoever.

4. Another way whereby we are often deceived into sin, is, by extending our lawful liberty too far.

To enjoy life is the dictate of nature; and what is agreeable to nature, can never be contrary to religion. It can hardly be conceived, that God would have first framed us with appetites fitted to receive pleasure, and then have forbid us ever to gratify those appetites; to have supplied us with the conveniencies of this world, and then utterly to have denied us the use of them. *Touch not, taste not, handle not*, may be the language of superstition; but it can never be the voice either of reason or religion. All the liberty that a reasonable creature can wish for, that Christianity allows; and it is so far from

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abridging us of any of the innocent enjoyments of life, that it rather heightens and improves them. But the misfortune is, that liberty is but too liable to be abused; and he that is resolved to carry it as far as he may, is in great danger of carrying it much farther than he ought.

It is certain that the mind cannot be always intent; it is necessary therefore sometimes to unbend it, that it may return to its office with fresh vigour and alacrity. That must now and then be relieved, as well as the body be refreshed; for the mental and corporeal eye in this are agreed, that they may both of them be fixed on their object so long, till at last they shall quite lose sight of it. Whatever entertainment therefore a man may choose now and then to strike off into, whether it be of diversion, company, or even the enjoyment of the creature, so that it be used with moderation, and with subservience still to this good end, namely, the benefit either of body or mind, it is undoubtedly lawful. And

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indeed of the lawfulness of this, none but a few melancholy or enthusiastic persons have any doubt. The chief danger is the other way, lest as the generality of mankind make use of this freedom without any scruple, so they indulge it without any restraint, and abuse their legal liberty into a sinful licentiousness.

And that liberty is but too apt to be abused, and sin to steal in upon us by means of it, is too obvious not to be observed; and we may safely refer to every man's experience for a proof of it,

For instance, how apt are our diversions to grow upon us, and instead of filling up a vacant hour now and then, to engross the best part of our time to themselves; to serve not as short respites from business, but to usurp the place of it, and make it, however necessary, give way before them; so that but in too many, their amusements come at last to serve instead of employments? And even of those who do not carry them to such an

excess as this, yet are not they too prone, however, to indulge them too far? Do they take them up but seldom, and quit them soon? or rather do not they return to them too frequently, and part with them too reluctantly? never once considering, if they be but satisfied, that the diversions themselves are innocent, whether their manner of enjoying them be innocent or not.

Thus again for company: Man was undoubtedly framed for society; and to say therefore that he must never enjoy it, is absurd. As he has the faculty of reason given to make him agreeable to himself; so, doubtless, one great end of speech is to make him agreeable to others. But, however, as lawful and as needful as conversation is, there is nothing that oftener proves a snare to us, or through which sin finds an easier admittance. For what are the ordinary topics of conversation? is it not too often upon absent persons, whose names are introduced purely to be exposed? as if men had no other way of making themselves

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selves appear virtuous, but by representing others as vicious as possible; and as if they thought so much taken away from another's reputation, was, in effect, so much added to their own. Is it not too much made up of groundless surmises, invidious reflections, sly insinuations, or laboured calumnies? Is there any, of how eminent a character soever, exempted from this kind of trial, or rather of execution? for neither can the best action pass without being traduced, nor the worst, if possible, without being aggravated. Every common slip and infirmity of nature shall be charged as a wilful transgression; nay, and the most exalted virtues themselves be interpreted into crimes, as issuing from some wrong principle, or directed to some base end. And as ready as too many are to report any calumny, there are others still as ready to receive it. And indeed, besides that proneness in corrupt nature to take things by the worst handle, here is the testimony perhaps of one whom we converse with, and probably there-

fore have an esteem for, ready to assert the truth of it; and it can hardly be thought we should love to keep company with those we scorn to give credit to. So difficult is it for us to hearken to the malicious suggestions of others, without losing something of our own charity at the same time. These are too often the topics of discourse among grave men. If we are in company with those of a gayer turn, our danger may be as great, or greater, of being infected another way. How impertinent generally is their conversation at the best? but, alas! how often too is it obscene or prophane? as if it was not enough for them to be bad, but they must endeavour to appear still worse; not content to practise vice, unless they propagate it too. To do which the more effectually, they perhaps have an easy and obliging address, a sprightly and ready imagination, some wit and some humour on their side; which, proportionally as they endear their persons to us, are apt to take off our aversion from their vices; for it

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is next to impossible thoroughly to love the man, and abhor his practices, at the same time; and if we can once come not to abhor them, we are in a fair way of going on to approve them; and from approving, to imitate them.

How apt sin is to creep in upon us, by our enjoyment of the creature, and our lawful use of it, to be perverted into a vicious excess and abuse, is too visible from the many gluttons and drunkards that are every-where to be met with, who must have often done violence to nature, before it could be brought to bear the loads that they lay upon it. They must have been inured to these ill habits by slow and leisurely degrees; and were probably brought into them at first, under a notion that they had a liberty to enjoy the creatures, as far as they served for the refreshment either of the mind or body, and so went on step by step, fondly fancying they were still but refreshing them, till they came insensibly to oppress them; it being difficult to hit the point.

point where temperance and intemperance meet; to know exactly where the innocent enjoyment ends, and the sinful abuse of it begins. And to this vice of intemperance in particular, as well as to all immorality in general, our company, if we are not discreet in the choice of it, is very apt to contribute; we being never so likely to prolong our meals and our cups beyond measure, as when we have the example of others to keep us in countenance.

5. All the ways I have hitherto mentioned, whereby sin is apt to deceive us, are, by its concealing itself some way or other under the name or appearance of virtue, or of something at least indifferent and lawful. Another way whereby Satan often ensnares us into his service, is, by multiplying the infirmities of nature on the one hand, and the difficulties of religion on the other; thus emboldening us to the commission of sin under the pretence of the first; and excusing us, under the pretence of the latter, in the omission of
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our duty. And thus we are brought into that dangerous notion of any sins being small, which yet are never committed, but they prepare the way for greater. It is certain, that of however quick a growth sin may be, yet that no more than any thing else can attain to maturity at once. A man will certainly venture upon those sins that appear least first; and even upon those too, at first, with some shame and reluctance; which checks to sin will grow still weaker and weaker upon every repetition of it, till, in time, they shall quite be worn out and decayed. And thus you will see a man come, at last, to act even the most horrid crimes with indifference, which he could not even have thought of at first without horror. Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? said Hazael, when Elisha first told him of the cruelties he should afterwards be guilty of; but notwithstanding he was thus startled at the bare mention of them then, yet we find he afterwards committed them with little or no dif-

difficulty or regret. But so swift and fatal often is the progress of sin, and so pernicious therefore those notions that tend to encourage it.

For instance, has do that plea of the frailty of our nature, how many things are charged upon that, which our own negligence only is to answer for. Thus you will find men frequently lay themselves in the way of temptation, and then impute it to their infirmity, that they are unable to resist it; never once considering, that though it may not be now in their power to resist it, it was, at first, to have prevented it.

And thus again, as to the difficulties of their duty, are they not many times complained of before they are tried? and if men will stay at phantoms of their own raising, who can help it? It is not peculiar to religion only, that it contains many things which may seem difficult and impossible to one unacquainted with them, which yet a little experience will prove to be not only possible, but easy; so that, in this case, as in all others,

others I have mentioned; sin still makes its way by a fallacy of the progress of sin, and so

6. I shall mention but one way more whereby men are apt to be drawn into sin; and that is, by the flattering hopes of an after-repentance; as conceits so absurdly as well as impious; that I did not a common experience convince us, that it too often is a motive, common reason would persuade us, that it never could be one. For to sin, with a purpose afterwards to repent, is voluntarily to do what we hope, one day or other, to be heartily ashamed and sorry for doing. It is as if a man should inflict a painful wound on his body, only to try the chances of a cure. We will repent; alas, how can we tell we shall ever have a mind to do it? Whatever serves to tempt us into sin at first, will naturally tempt us still to go on in it; and those arguments and notions in particular that would extenuate the guilt of sin, must proportionably take off from the need of repentance; for the heinousness of the one, of course,

course, enforces the necessity of the other; and so, on the contrary, lessen the one, and you lessen the other too. But could we suppose it in our will, does it follow that it will be in our power? I am sure the Scripture informs us, that we can do nothing of ourselves to help ourselves; and how much soever therefore the sinner may stand in need of God's grace, it is certain he can have little reason to presume upon it. Besides, what folly is it for a creature of to-day to depend on to-morrow? death may cut off him and his hopes together, and immediately consign him to the grave, where there can be no repentance.

These are some of the chief articles by which men are usually brought into sin at *first*; and we cannot but observe even from hence, when it has once entered into us, how natural it is to take root and grow up in us. But more particularly to lay open the methods whereby we come to be hardened in sin, will well deserve a separate discourse by itself. In
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the mean time, that we may not go away unprofited by this, give me leave just to run over the several heads I have mentioned, with some short observations upon each.

In the *first* place then, are we apt to be deceived into sin, by the near resemblance it often bears to virtue; as into covetousness, under the appearance of frugality; into profuseness, under the notion of liberality, and the like? yet let us, notwithstanding this, be assured, that there is an essential difference between good and evil, between the several virtues and vices, as much as there is between the substance and its shadow, between any thing that is real, and what is only counterfeit. That we may perceive which difference is the better, let us lay down this for a rule, that all the virtues are in perfect harmony together: and consequently whenever we are tempted to exercise any one virtue, so as to make it clash with another, then ought we immediately to stand upon our guard; for sin is certainly at the door.

For

For instance, are we tempted, under the pretence of frugality, not only to retrench all superfluous expences, but to shut our hands also against relieving those objects which it is fairly in our power to relieve? then may we be sure that, whatever this suggestion pretends to come from, it can proceed from nothing else but avarice; for frugality is so far from being contrary to charity, that we are to be frugal for this end chiefly, that we may be charitable; and frugality is the very hand from which our charity is to be supplied.

Thus again as to our charity; is our liberality for exerting itself at random on all objects alike, without a due regard had to their merits, or our own abilities, and that too rather in public than in private? let us immediately recollect, that this is not to be truly liberal, but to be ostentatiously and unjustly profuse; for charity ever consisteth, as with justice on the one hand, so also with humility on the other.

Again,

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Again, *secondly*, are we likely to be seduced into sin by popular names and opinions, as into a quick resentment of affronts under the false name of honour; and into a bloody revenge of them under as vain a pretence to courage? let us consider how utterly inconsistent such a spirit as this is to the whole spirit and design of the Gospel: how absolutely contrary it is to that free and generous forgiveness, which the Gospel so strictly requires of us, as the indispensable condition on which we are to hope for forgiveness ourselves. Let us remember, that we are expressly bid not to follow a multitude to do evil; and that however ridiculous a singularity in indifferent things may be, yet to be singular in the cause of religion or virtue, is ever a sign of a great and noble mind. In short, let us be persuaded that there can be no true courage without reason; and therefore, to show ourselves truly brave, let us dare to be wise to our eternal interest.

Are

Are we, *thirdly*, too apt to make the example of others our rule? let us reflect, that the best men are still but men, and therefore to be followed no farther than as they are followers of Christ; that what might be proper, and even praise-worthy, in them, may not be so to us, unless we are equally satisfied of the legality of the action, as they were: That the bare suspicion of sin will be enough to make the same thing a sin to us; which, because they had no doubt about it, was entirely indifferent, and therefore lawful to them.

Are we, *fourthly*, convinced how easily we are betrayed into sin by an indiscreet use of our liberty, whether as to diversions, company, or the enjoyment of the creature? let us then use them with caution and sobriety, as our recreation only, and not our business. Let us be sure to indulge none of them too far, particularly with regard to such company or diversions as we know are likely to lay temptations before us; let us never, if possible,
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enter into them at all, that being the only way whereby we can promise ourselves no infection from them; it being much more prudent, if we can, to prevent danger, than to trust to chance for a deliverance out of it.

Fifthly, with regard to that pernicious notion of our infirmities being more, and the duties of religion harder, than they are; by which means we come to think sins not so heinous, and to commit them with less regret; let us endeavour to do our duty conscientiously, and we need not fear but God's grace will make it easy too, either by supplying us with a strength equal to all our temptations, or by mercifully keeping us out of the way of temptations.

Lastly, with regard to that notion of an after-repentance; let us abhor it as the most fatal of all others; for who can be certain, in any sense, of the future? and who then would be so foolish as to place his salvation upon an uncertainty? Let us consider, that though we should live to repent, nay, and should

should have it in our power to repent too; yet at the best, we cut out for ourselves a great deal of trouble, uneasiness and shame by repentance; which should we miss of, we must be utterly ruined and undone to all eternity.

S E R -

S E R M O N IX.

P A R T II.

H E B. iii. 13.

*Exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day,
lest any of you be hardened through the deceit-
fulness of sin.*

HAVING thus laid open the several fallacies
whereby men are usually drawn into sin at
first; I shall now proceed to the consideration
of those, by which they generally become
hardened in it. And indeed it is but natural
to think, that, if sin once gets the possession,
it will be apt enough, even without any new
stratagems, to keep it; it being a matter of
much less difficulty to hinder the enemy
from coming in, than afterwards to drive him
out again. However, there is something in sin
so contrary to our reason and our interest, and

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the dread of an incensed God and eternal vengeance are so very terrible to human nature, that notwithstanding the difficulty the sinner may find in breaking off from his sin, he will yet find, for some time, as much trouble and uneasiness in going on in it. During therefore this struggle between reason and conscience on the one hand, and the bent of depraved nature and sin on the other, it is no wonder that the tempter should employ all his skill to secure the sinner to himself, by suggesting such false notions and reasonings, as may make him tolerably easy in his vice, by concealing or diverting the dreadful consequences of them; and this he is apt to do as from their present impunity, so particularly from the prosperity that too often attends them; by which, when the sinner is pretty well confirmed in the habit of them, the difficulty of repentance will be apt thoroughly to harden him in them.

First then men are often tempted to continue in their sins, because they are at present

unpunished in the practice of them. It is an observation of the wise many that because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil, a conclusion not more base and impious, than it is absurd and irrational; for where is the necessity that the sinner must be immediately punished? does the delay of punishment at all affect the certainty of it? does it follow, that, because God forbears to punish at present, he therefore will never punish at all? Were there no life after this, then indeed there might be some colour for such reasonings as these; but since God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, it will be a sufficient vindication of his justice, if the sinner will be certainly punished then. It can be no reasonable objection against his justice, though the sinner should meet with no punishment before. Were God's power confined and limited as man's is, then indeed might a speedy judgment

be often necessary, lest the criminal should possibly escape; but where the offender cannot possibly prevent or elude the sentence, there the person offended may certainly inflict it at pleasure. And how is it possible to fly from one, whose power is infinite, and who is from everlasting to everlasting? Were such a Being as this to be thus hasty in punishing every offence against him, he would but too much resemble men in their passions and resentments; and his punishments would seem not so much the effects of justice, as of revenge. Thus to act would look as if injuries affected *him* as they do *us*, and be an argument therefore rather of weakness than of power. And indeed men could never come to make so absurd a conclusion as this, but by absurdly imagining God to be like themselves, that is, passionate, and cruel, and revengeful, as they are. They find how every little offence galls them, how quick they are to resent it, and how glad they would be to revenge it too, were they sure they might do

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it with safety to themselves; inasmuch that they would often scruple not to take away the very life of their enemies, could they but effect it without any hazard to their own; and because they see God deals not with sinners so, therefore they are apt to conclude, that sin can never be so hateful to him as it is represented to be; and from hence are they tempted to go on from sin to sin, from one impiety to another, boldly and securely, without either fear or remorse. And that this, absurd as it is, is too often the manner of reasoning among wicked men, is the Psalmist's observation; who, Psa. l. 21. in the person of God himself, says, *These things hast thou done, and I kept silence, and thou thoughtest wickedly, that I am even such an one as thyself*; that is, hast interpreted my silence about thy crimes into a tacit consent, as it were, and allowance of them; and hast concluded, from my forbearing to punish thy sins, that I therefore have no abhorrence of them. But how he will resent such usage at their hands, is plain

from the very next words; but I will reprove thee, and set thee in order before thee; and therefore he goes on thus affectionately to warn all such of their folly and impiety, before it be too late. Consider this, ye that forget God: lest I pluck you away, and there be none to deliver you. Certainly the more natural and ingenuous conclusion from God's merciful delaying to inflict his judgments, is, to endeavour to avert them while we can, by a solemn and serious repentance. Such mercies on God's part, should naturally kindle the warmest affections of love and gratitude on ours. We should break off from our sins, if but from a generous shame of offending against such an infinite benefactor. Or should shame prove a principle too weak to reclaim us to our duty, one would think that our fears should at least prevail; for dreadful, no doubt, must the thought be, that repentance only can render us fit objects for God's mercy; that there can be no repentance beyond the grave; and that therefore, if we slip the time of

of repentance in this life, we must be utterly and irretrievably undone, beyond all hopes of mercy, in the other. So true, even in this sense, is that conclusion of the Psalmist, Psal. cxxx. *There is mercy with God, therefore shall he be feared;* so little reason has the sinner to make his present impunity serve as an encouragement to his sin. However, if the sinner is thus apt to be emboldened in his sin by bare impunity only, what wonder is it that he should be so, if he finds it attended with prosperity also, if he sees himself thrive in it, and upon the very account of it. To see vice, as it too often is, triumphant, and virtue depressed, has occasioned a harsh thought now and then of Providence, even in some of the best of men. Thus we hear Job expostulating and complaining, *wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea are mighty in power? Their houses are safe from fear, neither is the rod of God upon them.* Job xxi. 7, 8. And David goes farther to own of himself, Psal. lxxiii. 2, that from

this very consideration, his feet were almost gone, his readings and well might slept and why it but as he goes on, I was grievously affected with it, I do also see the ungodly in such prosperity, and He was too hasty to conclude from thence, that therefore he had been good to no purpose. Then haue I cleansed my heart in vain, and washed mine hands in innocency. All the day long haue I been plagued, and chastened every morning. If then such herges impiety as these have been thus tempted to judge hardly of Providence, so far as even to doubt of it, it must be ilefs wondrous sure, that impious and prophane men should be brought still farther from hence even to deny the very being of a Providence at all. They are too well satisfied, that if there be a God, they can deserve no prosperity from his hands, and therefore they are too ready to urge their prosperity as an argument that there is none. A conclusion not more blasphemous than senseless, as indeed the case ever will be, so much of sin, so much of folly too, for no consequence

quence can justly be drawn one way or other, either with regard to God's favour or displeasure, from the good or ill events in this life, till it can be proved, that there will be no life after this, but that is a thing impossible. The only rational conclusion that can be made, from the inequality of events here, is, that there will be a judgment hereafter, a day, wherein all these irregularities shall be set right, and Providence thoroughly justified. Those that argue against the being of a God, from the prosperity of the wicked, or the adversity of the good, do it upon this supposition, that such a dispensation is contrary to the nature of God, as a Being of infinite justice; but if this life is not designed for a state of rewards and punishments, God's justice seems little concerned in it, so that nothing against his being can, from hence, be concluded. But now, if, on the contrary, this life is designed only for a state of trial, as, from reason we should think it to be, and as, from revelation, we are assured it is,

consequence

since

since a life of virtue, or vice is left to every
 man's choice, and affliction often befalls the
 righteous, merely because he disdains, at the
 expence of conscience, to prevent or remove
 it; and prosperity is as oft the lot of the
 wicked, merely because he scruples no ways,
 however base, of acquiring it; and since vir-
 tue will meet with a reward hereafter, greater
 in proportion to its present sufferings, and
 prosperous vice so much a foret punishment;
 God's providence must needs appear equal,
 and all objections against it ridiculous and
 profane. Indeed Atheism has so little to
 say for itself, that one can hardly imagine
 that any man could ever bring himself to a
 serious and settled belief, that there is no
 God; but having, by a course of wickedness,
 made it his interest that there should be none,
 he rather wishes than believes that there is
 none. But now, if he only wishes that there
 may not be a God, he must have his fears too
 that there may; and therefore this must make
 him think, now and then, how to secure
 him-

himself; if there *should*; and from thence he is naturally led to some notions of amendments of life, to some efforts towards repentance, as what he finds to be the only condition of averting God's wrath, and of obtaining his favour; and, in this case, as in the two former, an habituated sinner will be apt to harden himself in his sin still the more; for, from finding some efforts to repentance vain, he will be tempted to lay aside all thoughts of it, as of a thing utterly impossible. *and all objections against it* You may remember, that among the several fallacies whereby I told you we are apt to be seduced into sin at first, that of the flattering hopes of *an* after-repentance was one, a dangerous fallacy no doubt, if for this reason only, that it places the whole possibility of our eternal happiness on the future; which, for aught we know, may depend upon the present moment. It is dangerous upon this account also, because it may be as well a standing reason for delaying our repent-

pentance, as it was at first for tempting us
 into sin. But we will now suppose an old
 sinner actually setting about his repentance;
 and here we shall find no small danger, that
 his repentance may prove vain and ineffectual.
 However easy it may have appeared to him in
 imagination, it will prove far different upon
 trial. Inveterate habits are not to be changed
 in an instant. From a soil that has been
 long neglected, no good produce can be ex-
 pected till after a long and laborious culture.
*Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leo-
 pard his spots?* then may ye also, says the
 prophet, Jer. xiii. 23. *do good, that are ac-
 customed to do evil;* implying, that custom is
 almost as hard to be conquered as nature.
 The least that can be meant by it, is, that
 to a man so long habituated to sin, re-
 pentance is one of the most difficult things
 in the world; that therefore it will require
 no ordinary resolution to bring it to ef-
 fect. Consider what shame and remorse he
 has at first to conflict with; what confusion

of face he must be in; what agonies of conscience he must feel, when he reflects upon his basest ingratitude to the best and most beneficent of Beings, when he looks back upon his whole past life, spent in direct opposition to the very God who gave it, and whom therefore he can, as yet, see in his terrors only; whose mercy he has so long despised, and whose vengeance therefore he has so much reason to fear. How lightsome and blissful a scene soever repentance may at length open to him, yet this is the gloomy passage that must necessarily lead to it. He must not expect to reap the comforts of religion, till he has for some time inured himself to the practice of it. Now it is but natural for him to start back at these difficulties, to be scared and dismayed at these apprehensions of his own guilt and God's displeasure; and it is well therefore if he does not fly to the usual refuge in these cases, his cups and his companions, to divert them from him. And yet, upon every relapse, his repentance becomes more

more difficult, and his guilt more terrifying, till at last, perhaps, his old sin still getting the better in every struggle (and without God's grace, they certainly will), he finds repentance an impossible thing, or, what comes to the same, he makes it impossible, by fancying it so, justly forfeiting the divine aid, because not exerting, as he ought, his own endeavours. And thus, being bereft of all hopes from the next world, he makes the most of the present; gives himself over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness, like the dog that is turned to his own vomit again, and the sow that was washed, to her wallowing in the mire, 2 Pet. ii. 22. This, it may be feared, is too generally the case; and this, without the particular grace of God, which such men can have little reason to expect, necessarily must be the case. And now let us imagine a more woeful condition; if we can, than of a man hardened in his sin, and consequently lost to all amendment; of

one so living here, as only to make himself for ever miserable hereafter.

To all who believe the certainty of eternal punishment for the wicked, (as all must that are here, or else it must be shameful hypocrisy that has brought us hither) to all such, I say, nothing can appear so dreadful in this life, as the state of that spiritual blindness I have been mentioning. It is with the soul, in this respect, as with the body, it is then most in danger when it is least sensible of its danger. It is a sign the mortification has spread far indeed, when the man is grown past feeling. This, one would hardly suppose to be the case of any here present, for such are not likely to frequent these places; and I hope we shall make it our care, as it is our utmost concern, that it never may; to which end, let us exhort one another daily, while it is called to-day, lest any of us be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. Particularly let me exhort you by all the ties of gratitude and interest, reason and religion;

gions; by all the solemn vows of obedience you have made at your baptism, and many of you; I trust, are now going to renew at the Holy Communion; by all the mercies you have received, or ever hope to receive; as you would obtain everlasting happiness, and avoid everlasting misery; in the name, and by the authority, of that God who created you, and the Son of God who died to redeem you, let me, I say, exhort you, let me conjure you, that you live worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called. O let it never be said, that God hath made you, that Christ hath died to redeem you, in vain! To this end, be as watchful for the good of your souls, as the great enemy of mankind is for their destruction; so shall his malice be frustrated, his most violent attacks resisted, his most subtle stratagems defeated.

To those of you, especially, who are yet but early in life, and who, it is to be hoped, from the advantage of a pious education, have not yet contracted any familiarity with sin,

let

let me advise you carefully to avoid all occasions that are naturally apt to lead to it, and to cherish in you an habit of industry, which, next to the grace of God, is the best preservative against it. Be sure you check all the beginnings of sin, for what the wise man says of the beginning of strife, is as true of the beginning of sin in general, that it is as when one letteth out water: When it is once suffered to get its head, one can neither tell how wide it will flow, or when it will be stopped.

To those of you who are unhappily engaged in sin, and are tempted to entertain vain hopes, because you are at present unpunished for it, or perhaps prosperous upon the account of it, consider what your present impunity, what all the prosperity of this world will amount to, when set in the ballance with everlasting misery, the unavoidable consequence of it. Consider, that without repentance it is impossible you can be saved, and therefore let the necessity of it make you exert

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your utmost endeavours to effect it. It may indeed, and must be difficult, in proportion as the habit of sin to be conquered is more or less powerful; but let not difficulties, in this case, be discouragements; but once thoroughly persuade yourselves that it *must* be done, and you will soon be convinced that it *may*. God's grace, if you seriously apply to Him for it, will come in, at last, to crown your endeavours; and you will still be able to *do all things through Christ that strengthens you*. Your habit of sin will every day grow weaker, the power of God's grace every day stronger in you than other, to the comfort of your souls here, and their everlasting happiness hereafter.

And, lastly, The many present advantages that attend the practice of this duty. I am to show why we ought to let our affection on things above.

your utmost endeavours to effect it. It may indeed, and must be difficult, in proportion

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or less powerful; but let not difficulties in this case, be discouragements; but once

Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.

God's grace, if you seriously apply to

T H E S E words are so clear of themselves, that it would be but abusing your patience to spend any time in explaining them; wherefore, without further preface, I shall take occasion to show, from hence,

First, The reasonableness of the duty, why we ought to set our affection on things above.

Secondly, The ground of that strong negative against the things on the earth, and how far we ought to extend it.

And, *lastly, The many present advantages that attend the practice of this duty.*

First, then, I am to show why we ought to set our affection on things above.

Now, that naturally has the best right to the affections of a reasonable creature, which comes recommended to him, above all other things, for its transcendent excellency in itself, and its peculiar suitableness and advantage to him. The bare excellency of a thing, considered abstractedly from all other regards, is rather the object of our contemplations, than our desires; and what we may admire indeed, but cannot reasonably affect. But when we find, that that, which is most excellent in itself, is likewise most advantageous to us; what, if obtained, will make us happy; and what may be obtained, if we will ourselves; then, if we act but consistently with reason, what before we meditated upon with delight, we begin with eagerness to pursue; and the choice of our judgment becomes the favourite of our affections.

Having premised this, I shall first show the transcendent excellency of the things above. Now, by the things above, can be meant nothing less than complete happiness in the king-

kingdom of heaven. What those joys are, wherein the happiness of heaven consists, are doubtless inexpressible, because they are inconceivable beings, as Scripture itself informs us, such as *neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man to conceive.* But at the same time that we are told they are inconceivable, enough is declared of them to show that they are of infinite worth. The joys there are described to be chaste and intellectual, the pleasures of the mind, and not of the body, entirely unallayed with matter and sense, and free therefore from those clogs that matter and sense are encumbered with. In short, it is to be with God, it is to be like God. Hence the fountain of happiness to all the inhabitants of that blessed place, whose happiness therefore will be as lasting as the fountain from which it flows. *I shall I, and holiness gain.*

What a noble and inexhaustible theme must it be for those happy beings to contemplate upon, the nature and perfections of

God! To consider him in his Eternity, that
 amazing attribute, whereby he cannot but
 have existed for ever without beginning, and
 must continue for ever to exist without end.
 To consider him again in his Immenity,
 whereby he is actually present to every particle
 of matter, without the least mixture with,
 or participation of, any. To consider him
 again in his power, whereby he could create
 a world out of nothing by his bare word,
 and has but to say it only, and it shall fall to
 nothing again. To consider him farther, in
 his wisdom and goodness, particularly in
 those grand instances of both the creation of
 the world, and the redemption of mankind.
 Lastly, to find all the mysteries of his nature
 cleared up beyond all doubt, and all the
 seeming irregularities of his providence proved
 equal, beyond all exception; when they see
 proud oppression at last punished, and meek,
 but injured, virtue rewarded, well may they,
 upon all these considerations, cry out, Great
 and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty,

just

just and true are thy ways. O King of Saints!
Rev. xv. 3. Happy, infinitely happy must
the state of those blessed spirits needs be, to
have every fear vanquished, every scruple
laid, every wish gratified; to have their un-
derstandings enlarged, their faculties exalted,
their affections enflamed with the knowledge,
and love, and praise of God: who alone can
fully employ their knowledge, and love, and
praise to all eternity.

Enough has been said of the excellency of
the things above: we are now to examine
their suitableness to us.

There is undoubtedly in man a principle
in its operations vastly different from the
body, and in its nature incomparably supe-
rior to it. It is by this, that he can take
past, present, and to come in one view: that
he can trace effects backward to their causes;
or can, from the causes of things, look for-
ward into their consequences. By thus re-
flecting, foreseeing, and comparing, he finds
what is good only for the present, and in

part, and what is so always, and upon the whole, and accordingly knows which to prefer, whenever there happens a competition between them. It is thus, when the body would take up with present and sensual delights, that the soul naturally flies off from them as too gross for her reception, and too mean for her gratification. No objects upon earth are pure enough for her desires, nor large enough for her capacities. She casts her views round into an infinity of space, far beyond where this world extends, and forwards into an eternity long after this world shall be no more. In short, she has hopes full of immortality, and from thence she presumes, that she is immortal.

From observing these powers and faculties in herself, she comes next to consider from whom those powers and faculties must proceed; and as the effect must necessarily presuppose a cause every way equal to it, she must conclude it to be some intelligent spirit, infinite in all perfections, equally present through

through all space, and necessarily existing through all eternity. Upon this Being she naturally fixes, as the compleat object of her happiness; able to fill up all her wants, and to satisfy all her desires. But, since during her abode here, she is forced to bear many clogs from the body, and interruptions from a sensual world; she is, of course, led to expect another life after this, wherein alone this happiness can be compleated; rationally concluding, in the mean time, to make Him, as much as possible, the object of her meditations; now, in the enjoyment of whom she hopes to be immortally happy hereafter.

This is what unprejudiced reason alone is apt to suggest, and what revelation still farther confirms and improves. We are there made more thoroughly acquainted with the nature of God, his design of making us happy; and the methods whereby we may become so; with the certainty of another life after this, and the difference between them; that this is a state of trial, and that of retri-
bution;

bution, that this is but our pilgrimage, but
 that our sojourn, our home, consequently that
 as citizens of heaven, we should have our
 conversation there, keep it constantly in our
 view and intentions, meditate upon it with
 the greatest delight, and with the utmost
 eagerness pursue it. Now, in the second place, to show
 why so strong a negative is put on the things
 on the earth; and how far we ought to extend
 it. *Set your affection on things above, not on
 things on the earth.* Now, this caution ne-
 cessarily supposes a great tendency in these
 to engage our affections; as well as a very
 dreadful consequence, whenever they do. That
 they have such a tendency is too no-
 torious to need any proof; every man may
 be satisfied of it from himself. Few, but
 whose condition, of life is very grievous in-
 deed, are yet willing to part with it; or if
 they are, it may be only because they are
 tired of the troubles of this life, not because
 they have set their affections upon, or made
 any

any preparation for a better. There is no
 one scarce, but, in some measure, is captivated
 by the things on the earth; so as to give
 some or other of them too easy an admittance
 into his heart, and to suffer them to take too
 full a possession of it; and yet, as notorious
 as this is, one would wonder at first whence
 it should be so. How the pleasures of this
 world, which at best are but short, and
 the more exquisite they are, for that reason,
 the shorter; the very enjoyment of which is
 mixed and unsatisfying, as well as the pursuit
 of them tedious; and the quitting of them
 troublesome; how those sensual gratifications
 which are common to brutes with man, and
 bring them near upon the same level; how
 these, I say, should come to be chose prefer-
 ably to those pleasures which are manly and
 rational, pure and unmixed, lasting and sub-
 stantial; which will admit us into a fellow-
 ship with saints and angels, and exalt us to
 the right hand of the Majesty on high. ^{It} ^{is} ^{not} ^{that} ^{they} ^{have} ^{let} ^{their} ^{affections} ^{upon} ^{or} ^{made}

There

There is plainly such a vast disparity, such an infinite disproportion between them, that, according to cool and impartial reason, the choice must necessarily be determined to the latter; in comparison of which, the others are lighter than vanity itself; and consequently the judgment must be first corrupted, before the affections can be so scandalously misapplied. And this is what Scripture represents the case to be, that since the fall of our first parents, man is very far gone from original righteousness; that the passions are broke off from the government of reason, and are for usurping a dominion over it; that the understanding has lost much of its quickness, in determining what is best; and the will is often too hasty to stay for its directions, or too rebellious to follow them.

Thus in man there is a natural propensity to sin; and it is in this that the world readily strikes in with it. All the objects that it presents us with, immediately and strongly affect the senses: There is nothing here but what

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material; and not therefore of itself suited to the spiritual nature of the soul: There is every thing in it that may serve to inflame the passions; and proportionably as they are inflamed, reason must be extinguished: The strengthening of the one, is ever the weakening of the other. There is not that corrupt affection in the heart, which has not its peculiar temptation at hand to solicit it; and their acting upon each other is many times so quick, as to prevent reason; many times so powerful, as to overcome it. Now if we consider man made up of matter and spirit, wholly conversant in a material world, which is full therefore of every thing that may affect the first, but nothing that can properly affect the second; when the objects of this world are present, and sensible, and therefore quick and powerful in their operations; whereas those of the other are future and invisible, and therefore strike but feebly, and make but a slender impression; when our appetites are naturally headstrong and violent,

and

and as eager therefore to catch every of their objects, as they are ready to offer themselves; and our reason cool and weak, and therefore not vigorous enough constantly to pursue what, because of their distance, but faintly attract it: When we consider, in this close union of the soul with the body, how easy it is for the soul to be depressed by it; on the contrary, how difficult to raise itself above it, and, while in it, to act, as it were, abstracted from it; I say, when we consider these things, we are not at a loss to account for so stupid a choice; for it is not how excellent and valuable any thing is in itself, but how excellent and valuable it appears to us, that must determine our opinion of it, and influence our affections towards it.

The necessity therefore of that caution in the text will be evident, if, as we have already showed how apt men are to let their affections on things on the earth; so, in the next place, we show what will be the consequence, whenever they do.

Now,

Now on the government of our affections here depends our happiness or misery hereafter: With the same tempers, habits, and inclinations with which we die, shall we rise again; and in the same shall we continue for ever. Here lies the fatal difference, that if our desires are all centered in the pleasures of this world, we shall have all the same passions for them still in the other, but not one of the same objects to gratify them; and a punishment more dreadful than this need not, cannot well be imagined; whereas, on the contrary, if we have made God the object of our love, in this life, he will continue to be so in the next, only our love of him will then be more intense, as our knowledge of him will be clearer, and our enjoyment of him compleater. And surely great must be the folly of setting our affections on things on the earth, if it be only that they can tarry with us but during our short stay here; still greater must it be, if they themselves will become our tormentors hereafter; what then, if,

besides

besides their own proper torments, they will still subject us to those other intolerable evils, which God, in his just anger, will inflict upon us; if, besides *that worm, which never dieth*, they will plunge us into *that fire which will never be quenched?*

And this is exactly what the Scripture represents the case to be, that God will admit no rival in our affections; that if we have fixed them on this world, at our leaving it, we may properly be said to have had our portion of happiness already: It would be well if that were the worst; but that after death we must expect a judgment. And now, surely we cannot but be sensible of the necessity of that caution in the text; for if man is, in his nature, thus miserably corrupted, and the world is so ready to strike in with this corruption; if we are so apt to be captivated by the things on the earth, and yet cannot be so without forfeiting all claim to those that are above; the necessity of the caution is plain; the only fear is, after what has been
said,

said, what caution will prove sufficient; for if this corruption in our nature is so strong, whence shall we be supplied with abilities to surmount it? And here we should be absolutely at a loss, did not the Scripture, which points out our disease, direct us also to the cure. But we are there promised an assistance answerable to all our wants, even the grace of God, that inward working of the Spirit, which begins and improves every good motion in us; which can enlighten our understandings to see what is good, and strengthen our resolutions steadily to pursue it. And this grace, if we ask, we shall have; if we seek, we shall find: And surely such a blessing well deserves our heartiest prayers; such a reward is abundantly worthy our utmost pains.

Having thus showed the tendency of these things to engage our affections, the great danger consequent thereupon, and the necessity therefore of that caution given against them, I have now only to consider how far that caution ought to be taken to extend.

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And

And now we are not to think, because we are forbid to set our affection on things on the earth, that we are therefore forbid to have any care or concern for them at all. It is unreasonable to suppose, that God would have implanted in men such appetites as were to serve to no purpose but to torment them; or to have placed them in a world of objects that should be constantly soliciting those passions, which it were absolutely unlawful ever to gratify. God did not make the body merely for man to destroy it; as far therefore as the being and well-being of this is concerned, so far we innocently may, so far we are bound in duty to provide for it. So that it is not so much the world, as the pomps and vanities of it; not properly the flesh, but the sinful lusts thereof, that we are to look upon and treat as our enemies. It is true we are bid, in a verse or two after my text, to mortify our members which are upon the earth; but then this is explained, in the words immediately following, to be *fornication, uncleanness,*

ness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness which is idolatry; where, you see, we are forbid not the use, but the abuse of our passions; not every affection, but only every inordinate affection; not any innocent enjoyments of life, but only those sensual and scandalous gratifications which debase human nature, and degrade a man into a beast; not frugality, or that moderate provision which may enable us to live comfortably to ourselves, and to fill the relations we are placed in decently; but only covetousness, or that over-anxious fondness for riches, which makes us uneasy in the want of them, and eager, without any regard to the means, of obtaining them; which makes them become the sole object of our desires, and the great idol of our affections; in short, which makes us transfer that admiration and esteem to them, which is due only to God, the dispenser of them.

In a word, while the body is kept in subjection to the soul, while the passions act

under the government of reason, and while the things that are temporal, are still valued in a due subordination to those that are eternal; so long the care of our body, the use of our passions, and the enjoyment of this world's goods are all innocent and lawful.

I come now, under my last head, briefly to show the many present advantages that will arise from the practice of this duty; and these will be found to be as various, as are the conditions and accidents of life. This will make the best fortune still much better, and even the worst very tolerable. For to consider all those evils that are apt to embitter human life, whether real or imaginary, such as are either of God's sending, or our own making; and what so effectual as this, either to support us under the one, or to prevent us from the other?

Thus, hath it pleased God to lay his afflicting hand upon any one? If he has but learned to set his affection on things above, to him affliction is disarmed of more than half its sting

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at once. It may indeed grieve his body : but it cannot reach his soul. On the contrary, that shall receive the greatest comfort from the greatest affliction ; for whether he considers God as the inflicter of it, he knows him to be one, who, in the midst of wrath, remembereth mercy ; and who therefore, he trusts, is, in this very instance, showing the tenderness of a father towards him, in chastening him, whom he loveth, and in scourging his son, whom he receiveth ; or whether he considers the affliction itself, sent either as a punishment for his sin, or as a trial of his virtue, he knows, let it be for the one or the other, that if he makes but that use of it for which God designed it, it will redound to his advantage at last ; and that this affliction, which is but for a moment, will work for him an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And now, what hardships think you sufficient to deter *Him* from going chearfully on, who is sure of such a reward at the journey's end.

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and of God's grace to direct and assist him all the way?

To come now to those much more frequent and intolerable evils, which I stiled imaginary, as having no foundation in truth, but merely in the fancy of men; the practice of this duty, I say, will not only support us under them, but, what is still much better, it will, in a great measure, exempt us from them. For if a man has set his affection on things above, he will regard the things of the earth so far only as they may be made subservient to those. He knows no wants but the wants of nature; and those are confined to a narrow compass. The standard he measures things by, is their intrinsic worth, and not men's false opinions about them. And thus, as he sets no undue value upon them, he is neither too anxious in the pursuit of them, nor too solicitous in the possession of them: While he has them, he enjoys them without a fear; and when he parts with them, he resigns them without a murmur.

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He can see others raised to the highest honours without the least envy, or behave in them himself with the greatest humility: It is for him only, who has an unjust admiration of them, to be either proud of them himself, or to envy them in others.

In a word then, and to conclude, are the things above so exceedingly excellent in themselves, and so incomparably advantageous to us; such as our souls are naturally framed for, by the boundlessness of their desires, and the endlessness of their duration? In short, are they such as God designed for our ultimate happiness, and without which it is impossible we should ever be happy? and shall we not, with the utmost eagerness, pursue them, and with the warmest affections embrace them?

Shall we choose the vain pomps and pleasures of this world, rather than so lasting, so substantial, so compleat a happiness? shall we prefer the body to the soul, earth to heaven, this life to eternity?

No, let us act like men, and rationally adhere to that, which our reason cannot but approve of: As we must naturally wish, that heaven may be our portion hereafter, let us, as much as is possible, keep it in our thoughts and intentions now: As we hope to be with God, let us endeavour to be like God. In short, let us not be wanting to ourselves, and we may be sure the Divine Grace will not be wanting towards putting us into such a happy frame of mind, as will raise us above the world, even while we are in it, and secure to us a happy immortality, upon our leaving it.

S E R M O N XI.

P S A L M cxviii 8.

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in man.

WERE we to consider man as he is in himself, we should find him to be a creature miserably weak, and insufficient for his own happiness; full of fears and apprehensions, doubts and misgivings; ever uneasy in the sense of those wants which he is unable to supply; and in continual dread of such evils as he cannot possibly prevent. Such is the state of human nature in general. But, alas! as if we were willing to be deceived, we see men through false mediums; we dress them up with imaginary excellencies, and then judge of them, as if they were real ones: And thus however inconsiderable each man may be absolutely and in himself, he may yet

yet seem somewhat considerable, when put in comparison with others. Thus, when we call this man great or powerful, it is not because he actually is so, but because there are others meaner or weaker about him: And thus may the most insignificant creature be made to appear with some kind of distinction, such as it is; and a fly itself make a figure, when compared with a mite. But to seem, and to be, are very different; and the natures of things will remain as they are, whatever our fancies about them may be. That we may therefore not vainly imagine there is that sufficiency in any of the sons of men which there is not, nor trust in that which will infallibly fail us, I shall take occasion, in a few remarkable instances, to consider God and man in contradistinction one to the other, by which the truth of the text will most evidently appear, that it is *better, infinitely better to trust in the Lord than to put any confidence in man.*

First,

First, therefore, let us examine man as to his *power*; and that we may see how weak it is at the best, and how little therefore to be depended upon, we will suppose one high and flourishing in the favour of a great and wealthy prince; and now what can he expect from hence? riches for his avarice, and rank for his ambition. But though the prince may supply him with these, yet can he neither secure him in the one from fraud, nor in the other from envy; nor therefore from those fears and anxieties that will be apt to haunt him in both. He may perhaps be able to protect him from any outward violence; but can he prevent the secret treachery of false friends, or cruel enemies? Alas! experience may convince us, how little able some of the mightiest of them have been to defend themselves; and how little therefore their help is to be depended upon by others.

But should we grant, for supposition sake, that the same power, which could supply wealth and honour, could as easily secure the
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possession of them, I mean, from all human attempts, whether of force or fraud; yet, is man liable to no injuries but these? Yes, surely, to ten thousand, which can neither be foreseen, nor, though foreseen, be prevented. Infirmities will prey upon us from within; accidents will attack us from without. To these the prince is equally subject with the peasant; and how then should he be expected to preserve others from those casualties, from which he cannot exempt himself?

But should we proceed still farther, and make this absurd supposition, that there were a power in man sufficient to guard us even from these accidents also; yet neither would that be a support proper for us to rest upon. For after all, what are we thus to be secured in, but the possession of this world's advantages? and what are all the advantages of this world to a soul, whose views extend so much beyond it, and whose desires are as boundless as nature itself? At the most, they affect the outward man; but are of so little weight

weight towards producing any real happiness, that they make no alteration at all in a truly great mind; that receives no addition from having them; suffers no diminution from the want of them: Many are miserable in the midst of them; and others full of comfort and enjoyment without them.

It is a noted observation, that nothing is great, the contempt whereof is great. Now to apply this, in the present case, what can the greatest man upon earth supply one with, but what others have been accounted still greater for despising? Riches, honour, and pleasure, the three great idols of this world, are what the old philosophers all professed to despise; and some of them demonstrated they did so, by quitting all pretensions to them, and by devoting themselves to a search after wisdom, in a life of study and retirement: In a word, the capacities of the soul are not only too large for the pitiful enjoyments of sense to gratify; but its nature likewise, as being spiritual, is entirely different from them,

them, and therefore not to be affected by them. So that though the possession of this world's goods were ever so strongly secured to us, yet must our soul be altered in its nature, in its capacities, and in its desires, before it could receive any proper satisfaction from them.

And now need I add any thing more to show the vanity of trusting to any human power, which can supply us but with external advantages at best; which can never be secured to us; and which, though they could be secured, would be insufficient to make us happy?

But it is not so with respect to God; with Him all things are possible: *Whatsoever the Lord pleaseth, that doth he in heaven and in earth, in the sea, and in all deep places.* Nothing can happen without His knowledge; nothing without His permission. There are no such things as casualties with Him; every thing is directed by His providence, and consequently every thing must fall within the com-

compass of His power. The most irregular things in nature, the winds and the storms fulfil His word. The most unpromising attempt shall succeed, if it has but His concurrence to back it; and without it, the most likely and best concerted project shall fail. Whatever he will have come to pass, shall come to pass, *though the earth stand up, and the rulers take counsel together.* Nothing shall be able to hurt him, to whom God vouchsafes His protection; nor all the world be able to help him, who has God for his enemy. And here I would be understood to speak not of the outward man only, but of the inward man also; nay, of the inward man especially; for it is in this that God's prerogative is more particularly concerned, and more signally exerted. As to the outward circumstances of life, they are such trifles in comparison, that it may well enough consist with God's justice, in this respect, to let all things ordinarily happen alike to all; the same event to the righteous and to the wicked.

wicked. But then, that those who trust in God may yet have the advantage of their side, it is for Him, and for Him only, to affect the soul as He pleases, with terror to such as do evil, and with comfort to such as do well. And thus it may be often observed (and, I believe, is generally the case, though it may escape our observation) that the wicked, in the midst of the greatest worldly power and prosperity, are yet *like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt*, Isa. lvii. 20. On the contrary, that the godly, in the midst of the greatest troubles and distresses, are many times not only patient under them, but do even rejoice in them, and for them. God knows all the secret ways to the soul, and to communicate his grace to it in what proportion he thinks fit; and that is always in proportion to our need of it. Though the whole world looks back about us, yet He can make all light within; though every thing else be taken from us, yet He can give us that joy and peace
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in believing, which shall be infinitely more than worth them all. He may discover to us so near and ravishing a prospect of the bliss and glories of the next world, as shall make us superier to all the injuries of this. And thus it was that many of the primitive Christians and martyrs were supported, insomuch that they seemed insensible of the most extreme tortures; and triumphed over death at the very instant they were in the agonies of it.

And now, can we reflect on the utter weakness and insufficiency on one hand, and the infinite power and all-sufficiency on the other, and be at all in doubt where to place our trust and confidence? Surely we must conclude, *that it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.*

Hitherto I have considered the vanity of trusting in man, from his want of power; but, though that could be supposed to be much greater than it is, I shall proceed, in the next place,

place, to show, that he is as little to be depended upon in respect of his *inclination*.

That power must needs be very precarious, that stands on so tottering a foundation as the will of man. We might almost as well expect, that the wind will always be fair, because it is so at present, as that the favour of man will continue always the same. You take your fortune perhaps to be fixed in the interest of some great man; but is he liable to no vanity? and may not another insinuate himself into his good graces by flattery, and afterwards work you out of them by calumny? Another thinks himself secure in his friendships and alliances; but what little reason he has to think so, every day's experience almost may convince him in the repeated instances of false friends, and even cruel parents. What with the natural suspicion of some tempers, and a warmth of passion as natural to others, together with the maliciousness of the world, which is always ready, by sly insinuations, to encrease the one; and,
by

by scandalous misrepresentations, to enflame the other; it will be very difficult to maintain, for any long time together, the same place in another's affections. Nay sometimes, where no outward prejudices concur to hurt us, the mere love of novelty will do it, there being a sort of feverishness in some men's minds, which makes them continually restless, and turning from one person, or thing, to another; the last generally being liked the most, only for being the last.

But it is not so with God. In Him there is no variableness or shadow of turning. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. God, as saith his beloved disciple, is love. Love is of the very essence of the Deity; and He can as soon cease to be at all, as cease to love those that love Him. He is not to be wrought upon by false appearances, groundless surmises, or laboured prejudices. He sees to the very ground of the heart; and if He finds but integrity there, that shall defend a man against ten thousand witnesses; and the

most slandered person, in this case, may with confidence, say, *who is he that condemneth? it is God that justifieth.* Nothing can possibly alienate us from Him but sin; and yet so tender is His mercy towards us, that even when we have sinned, He is ready to be reconciled again, upon our serious and hearty repentance,

And now, when we see how fickle the inclinations of man are, and how unchangeable the love and goodness of God, we must surely upon this account also, as well as the former, conclude, that *it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.*

But neither, though we could be sure of man's constant inclination to serve us to the extent of his power, would that be sufficient; for, *thirdly*, he is so ignorant, as often to mistake our true interest; and so may hurt where he means to help us. For instance: We will suppose one, out of concern to see his neighbour or relation linger out his days at a low and laborious trade, generously sup-
plying

plying him with the means to spend the remainder of his life at ease. And now what may be the effect of this? Why, the very same man perhaps, who was honest and happy, while poor and industrious, takes a turn with his fortune; and neither knowing how to busy himself properly, nor yet bearing to be idle, runs into a course of luxury, intemperance, and debauchery; and so makes his vices serve by way of employments. It is not to be questioned, but that many parents mean well to their children in those very indulgencies, by which they ruin them; and that they would not be averse to that discipline, which is so necessary for youth, did they foresee those ill consequences which usually attend the neglect of it. He, that should call his friend out of obscurity, into a place of great rank and eminence, must needs be thought to have his interest at heart; and yet it is not every one that adorns the private life, who is fit to shine in public. Some men's heads grow giddy with power; and they

owe their fall to their advancement. It is no uncommon thing to see one, who, when in moderate circumstances, was an humble, pious, inoffensive man, to be so intoxicated with prosperity, as to disdain the ground he treads upon; to grow insolent to all about him; and almost to forget there is a God above him. In short, there is no method, which one man can take to serve another by, but may turn to his prejudice; for all the outward advantages of life are indifferent in themselves; good to those who know how to use them rightly, and bad to those who do not; but how any one will use them, certainly no other, no, nor even himself, can tell, before he has them.

But God, who is so gracious as always to intend the interest of his people, is also so wise as never to be ignorant where their true interest lies. He perfectly knows every man's constitution, both as to soul and body; with all the several affections and properties of each. And as He knows how different objects will

will variously operate upon different tempers, so is it for Him to suit their circumstances accordingly. He can tell the strength of every temptation, and what the several temptations are, which each man in particular is most liable to; and can either cast his life in such a course, as that he shall not meet with them; or supply him with such a measure of grace, as may enable him, if he should, to surmount them. Thus foreseeing how one man would grow vain upon power, He may purposely make his condition low, as a guard to his humility; or how another would wanton in affluence, and He may therefore keep him poor, to preserve him chaste. And the same methods, which He takes to secure this man in his virtue, the same also may He take to reclaim that from his sin, the school of affliction being equally proper for both. Thus does He always supply, if not what is most pleasant, yet what is most profitable and expedient, for those who trust in him; either the food they desire, or the physic they want:

with-holding from, or bestowing on them the happiness of this world, as He judges most needful; but never failing to crown them with happiness in the other. Thus does He sometimes train one man up to prosperity through a long and laborious course of adversity, which, besides that it gives him the quicker sense and enjoyment of it, when it comes, so likewise has it this good effect that it makes him employ it better than he otherwise would, viz. in a more general and extensive relief of those afflictions which he has formerly smarted under the sense of himself. Another He may think fit to bring to the greatest honour and dignity through a series of extreme difficulties and dangers; which dangers, when they are past, shall have this double advantage, both to secure to him his greatness from the envy of the world about him, and at the same time to keep him thankful and humble, by reminding him of that Divine hand, which so visibly conducted him along to it. In short, to those who trust
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in God, if He gives them prosperity, it shall prove every way a blessing to them; if He sends them adversity, yet even that shall be no curse; nay, that shall be a blessing too, not wanting its proper support and comfort here, and sure of an eternal reward hereafter, so that not only in respect of His power and inclination, but also in respect of His knowledge, it is better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confidence in man.

We need consider but one material difference more between God and man, to show whether we may most rationally trust in, and that is, that man is mortal, and so at last must fail us, that God is eternal, and therefore cannot.

And this consideration alone, were there no other, were enough to convince us of the vanity of all human confidence. For granting, while they last, man's ability to help us to be ever so great; his intentions ever so sincere; his knowledge ever so much more extensive than it is; yet what are all these for us to rest upon,

upon, since the man himself must die, and then all his thoughts *perish*? Die every man must, ere it be long, and he may die this day, this hour, or this minute; so that either we may be cut off from our fairest hopes, or our fairest hopes cut off from us. The world itself must have a period; and how near its period it may be, is known only to Him, who made it; but suppose it at ever so great a distance, and that a man could be secured in the uninterrupted possession of it till then, yet even that could be no rational confidence for a man to build upon, unless his *down being* were to have an end at the same time; but how frail soever our bodies may be, our souls are immortal; and therefore it must needs be absurd for us to trust in that, which, at most, can pretend but to help the worst and meanest part of us in this transitory life; but can make no provision at all for our noblest part in that eternal state, which, upon its quitting the body, it is immediately to enter upon.

But

But God is from everlasting to everlasting:
 He is the same, and His years fail not. As
 He knows all the several methods of making
 a man happy; so can He secure him in the
 possession of his happiness for ever. He is
 the only complete good, and such therefore
 as the soul can rationally confide in, being
 every way fitted to its nature, and equal to
 its wants, its capacities, and its duration. In
 respect therefore of God's *eternity*, as well as
 upon all the foregoing considerations, *it is*
better to trust in the Lord, than to put any confi-
dence in man.

Thus have I showed as well the *folly* of all
 human confidence, as the *wisdom* of placing
 our trust in God; for that He only is infinitely
powerful, and therefore always *able*; infinitely
good, and therefore always *willing*, to help
 those who trust in him; that being *all-wise*,
 He cannot but *know* what is most conducive to
 their true happiness; and, being *eternal*, can
 for ever secure them in the possession of it.

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If,

If then we are convinced of the truth of what has been said, let us show the sincerity of our conviction, by its visible effect on our lives and manners. Let us live, as becomes those who trust in God, *righteously, soberly and godly in this present world*; without this, our trust will be vain; we shall neither receive any benefits of His grace here, nor have any title to partake of His glory hereafter.

able one neither, that the passions are, in themselves, absolutely unlawful, as being so many deviations from right reason; an opinion improbable enough, if on this account only, that it was so singular; all the objects of philosophers being, in this point, unanimous against them. But whatever date this might admit of among those who knew not the Scriptures, it must be a very unreasonable one, sure, among those who do. The lawfulness of the passions is visible in every page almost of the Gospel. Our Saviour, who is there declared to be a lamb without spot, i. e. free from all sin, is yet represented

If then we are convinced of the truth of what has been said, let us show the same

S E R M O N XII.

Let us live as becomes those who are God's people. *Serve the Lord with fear.*

without this, our trust will be vain; we shall

IT was the current doctrine of a certain sect of philosophers, and that no inconsiderable one neither, that the passions are, in themselves, absolutely unlawful, as being so many deviations from right reason; an opinion improbable enough, if on this account only, that it was so singular; all the other sects of philosophers being, in this point, unanimous against them. But whatever debate this might admit of among those who knew not the Scriptures, it must be a very unreasonable one, sure, among those who do. The lawfulness of the passions is visible in every page almost of the Gospel. Our Saviour, who is there declared to be a lamb without spot, i. e. free from all sin, is yet represented

sented as having the same passions with us, as
 pitying, angry, and sorrowful, by turns.
 And accordingly it proposes as many several
 motives to our obedience, as there are diffe-
 rent passions in human nature; our love and
 hatred, our joy and sorrow, our hopes and
 fears, are there all particularly addressed to;
 that so, where one motive fails, another may
 do the business, and men may be variously
 wrought upon according as their various tem-
 pers and constitutions are. Then only are
 the passions to be deemed unreasonable and
 sinful, when placed upon improper objects,
 or exercised beyond due bounds.

From the words therefore which I just now
 read to you, I shall take occasion to show

First, The nature and use of fear in ge-
 neral.

Secondly, In what respects God may be said
 to be the object of fear. And,

Thirdly, What is the proper manner in
 which our fear towards God is to be exercised.

or wherein the nature of religious fear particularly consists.

First then, I am to show the nature and use of fear in general.

Now fear always implies in it a sense of some approaching evil, and is therefore a necessary principle of self-preservation; which, by giving us a quick sense of our danger, naturally excites our care to provide against it. And such as the nature of the evil is, such ought our fear of it to be; being so far lawful as it is proportioned to its object, and unlawful so far as it exceeds it. It being highly absurd and irrational to suppose, that the passion is to operate upon all occasions alike, and to make us shun the least danger with the same assiduity as the greatest. Some evils may be so slight in themselves, as not to merit much anxiety about them; and some again, how great soever in themselves, may yet appear so trifling, when compared with others, as not to deserve the name of evils; nay, as to come under the notion of good; and

and therefore not to be shunned, but chosen. Such are all evils of pain, when compared with those of sin; all those which affect the body only, when compared with those which affect the soul; in short, all those which are temporal, when compared with those which are eternal. Undoubtedly a man may lawfully decline, if he can, all evils whatsoever, provided that he uses no means of declining them but what are lawful; and in every respect may, nay, and ought too, to consult his present safety, so that he endanger not thereby his future happiness. But whenever there comes a competition between them, then we must recur to the rule just laid down, to prefer the less evil before the greater, and ever to shun sin as the greatest of all. Thus ought a man to part rather with a limb than his life, and with his life than his conscience; and while our fear is not so violently wrought upon as to transgress these bounds, it answers the end for which God designed it. No man certainly can be obliged

obliged to court persecution; on the contrary, every man may so far dread it, as to use all innocent means of avoiding it; but should he be once brought into those circumstances, of necessarily submitting to sin or death, then if he acted consistently with this passion, he would certainly prefer death to sin; nor fear them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

And this brings me under my *second* general head, to show in what respects God may be said to be the object of our fear; which will plainly appear, by considering what our natural notions of God are; and how these notions must necessarily affect us.

Now, one of the first notions which we frame of God, is, that He knoweth all things; *that He is about our path, and about our bed, and spieth out all our ways; that there is not a word in our mouths, nor a thought in our hearts, but He knoweth it altogether.*

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That this Being, who is thus every where present, and infinitely knowing, is infinitely holy too; in so much that the angels are charged with folly before Him, and the heavens are not pure in His sight. Add to this, that He is almighty; so that, in the exercise of his power, He is uncontroulable and irresistible. That this Being, who is thus every where present, and infinitely knowing, holy, and powerful, is our Lawgiver, to whom we are accountable for all our thoughts, words, and actions; and who has bound His laws upon us by the strongest of all sanctions, even that of eternal misery. And can we thus conceive of Him, and yet be under no dread of so just a judge, so terrible an avenger? Surely this consideration must affect us, or nothing can. For when we reflect upon ourselves, alas! what are we, but miserable and indigent creatures at the best; all of us continually depending upon God, and yet too many of us living in open rebellion against Him. If Moses, though God's friend, yet trem-

trembled at His presence; if even the holy angels themselves are said to veil their faces, and fall down before Him; how then shall we, dust and ashes, dare to appear, especially if we compare His holiness and our sins, His majesty and our meanness, together? It is true, we may rush on in a sin careless and therefore fearless; but, if we seriously consider God as our lawgiver, we must needs entertain the most awful apprehensions of Him and His tribunal. If we are sensible of the Divine wrath, we must dread it; if we believe eternal vengeance, we must with, and endeavour, all we can, to escape it.

Which naturally brings me under my third general head, to show in what manner our fear towards God is to be exercised; or wherein the nature of religious fear particularly consists.

Now, were we to consider those attributes of God only, His infinite presence, holiness, justice, and power, exclusive of those other attributes, His mercy and goodness; were we

to consider His laws with regard only to the penalty, without any view also to the glorious recompense, annexed to them; were we to consider ourselves as in a state of frail nature only, without any respect to the merits of our Redeemer, and the assistances of his Holy Spirit, we might indeed justly fear God's presence; but so as, at the same time, to sink under the sense of it. But when we consider also that God's mercy is over all His works; that He is infinite in goodness, as well as in power; both mighty and willing to save; when we consider the gracious design of His laws, namely, to make us holy, in order to make us happy; when we consider that eternal reward, if we perform our duty, together with the assistance of His grace to enable us to perform it, and the powerful merits and intercession of our Saviour to add weight and worth to it; then, I say, we begin to feel in us that sound principle of obedience, that true filial reverence, which is a proper mixture of love and fear; and operates with
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the joint force of both; which makes us fearful of offending, and desirous of pleasing God, at the same time; which makes us look upon Him not as a hard master, whom we hate to obey, but dare not resist; but as our heavenly Father, whose majesty will make us approach Him with awe indeed; but whose paternal goodness will make us approach Him with confidence too.

And this will enable us to set the distinction between a servile, and a filial or religious fear, in its true light. For that properly is a servile fear, which considers God in his terrors only; as omnipotent to destroy, but not to save; as rigorously exacting from us such duties as it is impossible for us to perform; and yet severely punishing us, if we do not perform them; which makes us apprehend Him to be the author of evil, and one who delighteth in the miseries of His creatures, and who, as such therefore, must be equally the object of our terror and aversion; which if it extort any obedience at all, will be such

an one only, as a captive is forced to pay to his conqueror, or a slave to a tyrant. But a God without goodness is a contradiction in terms; and therefore thus to conceive of Him, is blasphemously to deny His nature and perfections. This is to worship Him, as they say the Indians do the devil, for fear of the mischief he may do them; a worship more suitable to the malice of hell, than to either the mercy or majesty of heaven. But indeed the more natural effect of this servile fear, is, to make us obstinate and desperate, as thinking it impossible for us to please God, and therefore never to attempt it.

But now religious fear is built upon a serious sense of all God's attributes; and therefore, though the passion of fear, as I noted before, has always evil for its object; and everlasting punishment, as the greatest evil, must, in all reason, be the object of the greatest fear; yet religion teaches us, that God is but the inflictor of it, and our sin the only cause and author of it; and that therefore the proper
object

object of our fear, in this case, is not so much God, who inflicts it, as our sin, which deserves it, and that with regard to God therefore, we are so far indeed to fear Him, as not willingly to offend Him; but with regard to our sin, that we are so to dread it, as to abhor it too. The Scriptures represent Him indeed as jealous for the honour of His laws, and in justice concerned to punish the violation of them; but willing rather, infinitely more willing that we should obey them, and accordingly, by all possible rewards, as encouraging our obedience; so that a truly religious fear, or fear when properly exercised towards God, equally respects His favour and displeasure, and binds our duty upon us by the united influence of both, making us as *to serve the Lord with fear, so to rejoice in Him with reverence too.*

But here perhaps it may be urged, what then shall we say of many poor wretches, who profess to fear God, from a sense of His vengeance only? Are all such immediately to

be condemned, as wanting that religious fear I have been describing? God forbid: For though this fear is far short indeed of that which has been mentioned, and may yet be preparatory to it, and at last, end in it. It may be the first dawning of this religious fearing the sinner's breast, which, within a while, may grow as bright and as comfortable as that, there being much such a difference between them, as between a tree at its full growth, and one just planted, which, though weak and naked at the present, may yet, in due time, by a proper culture, and the kind influence of heaven, become as vigorous, as flourishing, and as fruitful as the other.

For to state the case: Has the person, who thus fears God, lived hitherto in open defiance of Him and His laws? What principle then in nature can lay hold on him, unless fear does? Such a one judges not by his reason, but his appetites; which, being depraved by their long familiarity with sin, can have no relish for any thing besides it. All arguments,

ments, drawn either from the perfections of God's nature, or the dignity of his own, are lost upon him. Vice has no deformity, nor holiness any beauty to him; whose eyes are shut against the sun, and whose heart is enslaved to the other. In this case, the Divine vengeance, and a sense of everlasting torments may possibly awaken him; but nothing else can do, and if the terrors of the Lord do but persuade him to check his course, and consider, they have the effect, which by nature they were meant to have; and he who now stops his sins from the dread of punishment only, may go on to perfect holiness in the fear of God; that truly religious fear, which having a proper respect to all the Divine attributes, naturally exerts itself in a conscientious discharge of all religious duties.

So that the fear which thus seizes the sinner at first, though not indeed that completely religious fear itself, is yet a good step towards it, and a necessary introduction to it; and very different from that servile one, which

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I before mentioned, as appears by this, that here is a manifest alteration effected by it; the sinner is checked in his sins by the means of it; and to be in any measure reclaimed from vice, may be considered as a less degree of virtue. But the truly servile fear has no such influence at all; being such an one as the devils themselves are said to have, who believe and tremble, but yet go on sinning, and tempting to sin, notwithstanding it.

And now, from what has been said, I should hope something might be drawn for the comfort of those well-meaning, but melancholy, persons, who are apt to judge of themselves more severely than they ought, and to pronounce a sentence in God's name, but without his authority, equally injurious both to His honour, and their own peace: For as one great reason of their anxiety is a mistaken notion of fear in general, or the fear of God in particular; so one would think nothing more need be requisite than to rectify their

their notions in these points, and so, by removing the cause, to remove the effect with it. As to the lawfulness of the passions themselves, no one, I suppose, will make any doubt; I am sure, if he consults Scripture, he cannot. They are necessary parts of our nature, and must needs therefore be good, as coming from God; good in themselves; and then only vicious when they go beyond reason, which they were made to follow. They all have each their proper use; and the use of fear, as I said before, is, by giving us a quick sense of our danger, to make us consult our safety; and when it does this, it serves the end for which nature designed it. But now, as man is a creature made up of soul and body, and the dangers that affect the latter of these, are but temporal, whereas those of the former are eternal; we ought certainly to guard against these most, and consequently, if the passion of fear is necessary and lawful in general, in the affairs of reli-

religion and another world, it must particularly be so.

If it be said, that we should serve God from more generous principles, such as love, gratitude, and the like, it must be owned, that the more freely we pay God our service, the more acceptable it will be; but God has so closely interwoven our duty and our interest together, that it is almost impossible for us to be entirely disinterested in so important an affair; and he has besides so often pressed our duty upon us, from this very motive, that we may be sure it is but reasonable in us to attend to it. Rewards and punishments are purposely annexed to God's laws, either to allure or to terrify us into our duty; which if we conscientiously perform, whatever principle it may arise from, it will certainly entitle us to the reward annexed to it. Now whether we serve God originally from our hopes, or our fears, self-interest is equally the motive in both cases; and is equally a proper motive in both, when we so look upon that as

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to look beyond it too, and propose our happiness as subordinate to God's glory.

If it be urged, that the Scriptures command us to love God with all our heart, and affirm besides, that perfect love casteth out fear; let it be remembered, that the same Scriptures enjoin us to fear God too. And undoubtedly, in a state of temptation as this world is, even the best of men, as being liable to sin, must, in some measure, be apprehensive of the punishment due to it; for wherever there is danger, there must be fear; and the one ought always to bear a proportion to the other. So that perfect love is not to be expected, but in a state of perfection; it is what it may very well become us to aspire after as much as possible here; but what we must not hope wholly to attain till hereafter; when we may love God without fear, as being secured in our enjoyment of Him beyond the reach or possibility of danger.

In a word, fear is perhaps the only principle in nature that can reclaim a very bad man;

man; and it may sometimes, nay, and often does, pursue very good men too, as being a part of their constitution, in which case it is an infirmity, not a sin, and to be pitied therefore, and not condemned. Let such men therefore, instead of perplexing themselves about the nature of their fear, examine into the effects of it; which, if it makes them serve God to the utmost of their power, is, certainly, let them call it by what names they please, a truly religious fear, and such as God will accept and reward.

Doubtless religion is apt to inspire the mind with joy, and to give a certain peace and confidence, which nothing else can; but, in persons of a melancholy cast, this is an effect, how much soever to be wished, not always to be expected. It is what, if it please God, He may confer as a blessing; but not what He will exact from them as a duty.

Let them therefore act true to this principle, which nature has implanted in them; let them so fear God, as to serve Him too;
and

and then may they rest assured, that their sincere, however imperfect, obedience will not fail of being graciously accepted, and infinitely rewarded, through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ,

Who, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, liveth and reigneth ever one God, world without end.

will accept and reward.

Double religion is apt to inspire the mind with joy, and to give a certain peace and confidence, which nothing else can; but, in persons of a melancholy cast, this is an effect how much sooner to be wished, not always to be expected. It is what, if it please God, he may confer as a blessing; but not what

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He will exact from them as a duty.

Let them therefore set true to this principle, which nature has implanted in them, let them to fear God, as to love Him too.

and then they may rest assured that their
lives will be preserved, and that they will

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be preserved from all evil, and that they will

THE nature of a God is so natural to man

as that perhaps from the earliest ages, down

to the present time, there has never been

any nation, country, or people, who have

not believed in the existence of a God, and

in the truth of his word, and in the power

of his arm, and in the greatness of his

name, and in the glory of his kingdom,

and in the wisdom of his counsel, and in

the justice of his judgment, and in the

truth of his word, and in the power

S E R M O N XIII.

E Z E K. xx. 20.

*Hallow my Sabbaths, and they shall be a sign
between me and you, that ye may know that I
am the Lord your God.*

THE notion of a God is so natural to man, as that, perhaps, from the earliest ages, down to this present time, there has scarce been any nation entirely without it. Men have had indeed various names for Him, and very different conceptions about Him; but still, as to the thing itself, that there is some superior and invisible Being, which we call God, there seems to have been a general and almost universal agreement. This diversity of opinions, as to the nature of God, hath produced near as great a diversity in the manner of worshipping Him; but whatever different forms of worship may have prevailed among

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different nations, yet this, I believe, will be found to be common to all, that they have constantly observed some symbol or other, significant of the God they worshipped, and of the Religion they professed. In conformity hereto, it is, that God says, in the words of my text, *Hallow my Sabbaths, and they shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am the Lord your God.*

In speaking to which words, I shall take occasion to show,

First, How properly the Sabbath is a sign of the true God.

Secondly, The great use and advantage of the institution.

Thirdly, What is meant by *hallowing the Sabbath*, or in what manner we are to observe it, so as to answer the end of its institution. And,

Fourthly, The great sin of neglecting, and the much greater still of prophaning it.

First then, I am to show how properly the Sabbath is a sign of the true God. Now, in

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discourſing of the Sabbath, it will be proper to conſider it in a double reſpect, either more generally, as being a certain portion of time appropriated to God's honour, viz. every ſeventh day; or more particularly, as to the day itſelf, why ſuch an one of the ſeven, rather than any of the reſt, and in both theſe reſpects, it will appear to be the moſt proper ſign to acknowledge the only true God by, whether according to the Jewiſh or the Chriſtian uſe of it.

As to the *firſt*, why every ſeventh day is to be a day of reſt, after we have fully diſcharged all the neceſſary employments of life on the other fix, is plainly to commemorate the work of creation; and proper therefore to teſtify our belief in, and worſhip of, the true God, under the character of our Creator; who, as we find, *in ſix days made the heaven and the earth, the ſea and all that therein is; and reſted the ſeventh day, and bleſſed the ſeventh day, and ſanctified it, Gen. ii. 3.* And ſo far as relates to the keeping of every ſeventh day

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for a Sabbath, the institution seems to have been from the beginning of the world, and the reason of it will last to the end of it too. And in this distribution of time into six days of labour, and a seventh of rest, both the Jews and we are agreed; therein professing ourselves servants alike to God our common Creator. But now, though God's resting on the seventh day might be the general reason for our consecrating continually one day in seven in commemoration of it; and though that be the only one on which it is enjoined us, in the fourth commandment; yet this could never be the reason for our fixing on any particular day of the seven for this purpose, rather than any of the rest; since on what six days soever we laboured, and on what day soever we rested, so that we religiously kept every seventh for a Sabbath, the original design were sufficiently answered.

Wherefore I shall, in the next place, consider the reasons for fixing a particular day; and these will appear to be various, with

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regard to the Jews and the Christians; who, as much as they are agreed in dedicating the same portion of time to God, yet differ as much in the choice of the day they dedicate. They both profess themselves servants to Jehovah, the Creator, alike; but each in a relation peculiar and proper to themselves; the Jews with an especial respect to God's delivering them from their Egyptian bondage; the Christians, with respect to the spiritual deliverance vouchsafed them, viz. their redemption by Christ: And accordingly they severally keep that day, on which their several deliverances were wrought. Thus the Jews make Saturday their Sabbath; it being on that day that God overwhelmed Pharaoh and all his host in the Red-sea, and so delivered Israel out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage: The Christians choose that, which, with the Jews, was the first day of the week, viz. our Sunday; that being the day on which God raised Christ from the dead.

And from hence, the reasonableness, or necessity rather, of our altering the day, from the last to the first day of the week, is plain and obvious; for, since the temporal deliverance of Israel by Moses was intended only as a type of the spiritual deliverance of mankind by Christ; the last, when effected, must necessarily supersede the former; and, by fulfilling its intention, abolish its institution; according to the saying of the apostle, *when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away*; and consequently the day of the spiritual redemption ought to be preferred before that of the temporal one, otherwise we should seem to undervalue Christ's coming into the world, and preposterously set the shadow above the substance. Thus have I endeavoured to show how properly the Sabbath is a sign of the true God, whether it be considered more generally, as such a certain portion of time appropriated to his service, viz. every seventh day; or still more particularly, with regard to our fixing

fixing on this day of the seven for it, rather than any of the rest; the first directly tending to acknowledge God as our *Creator*; the latter, to acknowledge the same God as our *Redeemer*; and accordingly we may significantly enough call it the *Sabbath*, in allusion to God's *Creation*; or more emphatically still, *the Lord's Day*, in allusion to Christ's resurrection.

And now, having shown how properly the Sabbath is a sign to acknowledge the true God by; I shall proceed, in the *second* place, to show, that the institution of it is of the greatest use and advantage to man, considered under what respects or circumstances soever.

For instance: Is his condition such as that he must necessarily earn his living by his labour? then what a comfortable provision is here for him! since this reasonable return of rest gives him still a new supply of spirits; which, without it, would soon be exhausted, and so feeds, as it were, his lamp of life anew. By this means, that labour, which

would otherwise, in a little time, destroy his health, becomes the very means of preserving it. And hence it is, that the healthiest and the longest lives are generally to be found in the most laborious men. Nor is this institution more serviceable to his body than his mind; since it equally conduces to the benefit of both. By this he has an opportunity of acquiring the most important knowledge, his duty to God; and of learning the most compendious method of contentment in this life, by being assured of eternal happiness in the next. Nor is this appointment needful only for the poor and laborious part of mankind; it is equally necessary for the rich and prosperous also; to *these*, that they may know God; to *these*, that they may not forget Him. Ease and affluence are but too apt to make men careless and sensual; and though the natural effect of all God's gifts must be to inspire us with gratitude to the Divine Author of them, yet experience may convince us, that

that they are not always attended with this good effect. Men are too prone to enjoy the gifts, without considering either from whom they came, or for what purposes they were designed. Thus shall you hear men frequently ascribing all their worldly advantages to their industry, or fortune, which were merely the overflowings of God's bounty. And if they are thus wrong in ascribing them, can it be wondered at, if they are as wrong in the application of them? How reasonable then is this institution to awaken their remembrance of God, and to bring them to such a constant and grateful sense of his favour, as that their abundance shall prove a blessing, doubly a blessing to them, both in their enjoyment of it now, and when they come to render up an account of it hereafter.

By this appointment, God hath so wisely portioned out our time for us, as to make it admirably subservient to our temporal and spiritual interest, at the same time. By this has every man an opportunity of carrying on
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the business of this world and the other, at once; whereas, had it not been ordered just in the manner it is, either the one or the other must, in all probability, have been neglected. If more days were assigned for the affairs of this life than there are, besides that the too constant pursuit of them would soon wear out our bodies, they would be apt too much to engross our minds too; we should grow to think them so necessary, as scarce to think any thing else so; and come at last to throw aside religion, which is indeed the one thing needful, as the only thing superfluous. On the contrary, were there fewer days for this purpose than there are, the common wants and necessities of life could hardly be supplied. Neither would the fields have their due culture, nor business its proper dispatch. But now has the poor man a time to earn his bread, the mechanic to exercise his trade, and every one to answer his respective calling. At the same time, how seasonably does this day still return upon us, to keep the sense of piety

piety warm in our hearts, and to remind us, that however different our employments, as to this life, may be, yet there is one common employment and grand concern of all mankind, namely, with one mind and one mouth, to glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this that maintains the public and solemn worship of God, and the visible profession of Christianity in the world; since, however Christians differ as to other points, yet in this they are found all to agree, in observing alike the day of our Lord's resurrection. It is this, *lastly*, or nothing else, that must preserve, not only the name and face of religion, but the very life and spirit of it too. And now, if religion, or the true knowledge of God, is of the greatest importance to mankind; (as in such a congregation as this, I hope, I may take it for granted to be) can there be a better argument to prove the excellency and advantage of the institution, than this, that it is absolutely

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the most effectual method of preserving this knowledge, that can be thought of?

From considering therefore the use and excellency of this institution, I shall go on now, in the *third* place, to consider, what is meant by *hallowing the Sabbath*, or in what manner we are to observe it, so as to answer the end of its institution; so as to reap the advantages which were proposed by it.

Now, to hallow the Sabbath, is to set it apart to God's honour and service; and, of course implies, that we should abstain from all the ordinary employments of life, all such things as would be apt to debase our minds, and hinder them from fixing upon heavenly objects. The mind of man is of such a nature, as not to be capable of attending to several things at the same time; multiply the object, and you necessarily divert and weaken the attention; consequently would we dedicate this day to God as we ought, we should dedicate it entirely to Him alone.

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We should, this day above all, make Him the constant subject of our thoughts and our desires, of our prayers and our praises. We should meditate upon his nature and his attributes, his word and his works; and particularly upon those two grand instances of the Divine power and goodness, which the institution itself more especially directs us to commemorate, the *creation* of the world, and the *redemption* of mankind. The whole day should be divided, if possible, into so many acts of piety; so that, whether in our closets, or with our families; whether in our reflections with ourselves, or in our conversations with others; whatever we think, or say, or do, should all refer to the glory of God. Every parent, every master, every one in any authority ought, this day at least, to see his children, his family, all under his particular care, instructed in the knowledge of their duty; and to encourage them, by his influence and example, to the practice of it. Particularly high and low, rich and poor, one with

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another, ought all to frequent the public assemblies, there to worship God in the beauty of holiness. This is an obligation which God has laid upon all; and what none therefore, but upon sickness or necessity, can be excused from. That God's name might be publicly honoured, and the true religion openly professed, were the chief reasons for its being first instituted, and afterwards continued. Let no man therefore flatter himself, that, if he be but careful to abstain from all the common cares and offices of life, and to offer up his prayers and his praises at home, that is sufficient; God's house is certainly the most proper place for God's worship; and till this be frequented, the principal part of his duty is left undone; the chief design of the institution is unanswered; and consequently all the most eminent advantages proposed by it, as to Him, must be forfeited. He can have no right to expect a blessing, either upon his temporal or spiritual affairs; on the contrary, not to comply with so easy and reasonable an
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institution, is enough to bring down God's displeasure upon him, and to make him miserable both here and hereafter.

Nor will this at all seem strange, when we shall have considered, in the *last* place, the great sin of neglecting, and the much greater still, of prophaning it.

As to the *first*. To neglect the paying God so easy a tribute as one day out of seven, must, at least, imply a forgetfulness of our obligations; as that must necessarily imply ingratitude. Nay, with respect to benefits received, to forget, and to be ungrateful, are the same thing. And now, who is there, that but hears the name of ingratitude, and does not condemn and detest it? Consider it only with regard to men, and is there a crime more odious in itself, or more hurtful to society, than this? Every benefit that we receive, naturally binds us to an equal return, where we are able to make it; and where we are not, to the best we can. And by this mutual intercourse of benefits and requitals

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it is, that civil communities must have been first cemented, and must for ever be supported; and very justly therefore is an ungrateful man looked upon as a monster in nature, and a common enemy to mankind.

But now if ingratitude is so shocking from man to man, how much more must it be from man to his Maker? as much, no doubt, as the difference is betwixt God and Man. What are the greatest benefits which one man does, or can, bestow on another, in comparison of those, which God hath bestowed upon us all? They, at best, can serve but as comforts and conveniencies of life; but God hath given us life itself: They affect the body only; but God offers us such as will affect the soul also: They all must be confined to this present world; but God's are substantial blessings, and such as will last to all eternity. And shall we render then nothing unto the Lord for all his benefits? shall we grudge the seventh day to *His* use, when he hath so freely allowed us the other six for

our own? shall we refuse so small a part of our time to *Him*, who had so just a right to the whole? I dare say, there is no one, who hears me, so disingenuous, as not to own the baseness of such usage as this, and how unworthy it must make a man, even of God's common benefits, much more, then, of His peculiar blessings. To consecrate every seventh day, as hath been said before, is to commemorate God's resting that day from the work of creation, which was finished in the preceding six; and not to use therefore the Sabbath, as he intended it, for a sign between *Him* and *us*, is, in effect, not to acknowledge Him for our God; and if we disown God for our Creator, what right can we have to expect Him for our Redeemer?

But if the neglect of this day is so shameful, what then must the prophanation of it be? If it is so foul a crime not to employ it to those sacred purposes for which it was designed; how much blacker still must it be to abuse it to quite contrary ends? to make it a

day of idleness, gaming, intemperance, and the like? If the first was to forget God, this is to defy Him. This is not only not to comply with His commands, but actually to oppose them; not only negligence, but wilful disobedience; not ingratitude only, but downright rebellion.

The prophanation of this day amongst us, is but too visible; God grant, that its effects may not soon be but too deplorable. It is certain that, without religion, we can have no right to the protection of heaven; and that, without *that*, all other protection must be vain. Men may be false; at best, are but weak: And so, in the first case, may not be hearty; in the other, not able, to defend us. But God alone is infinitely good and powerful; and therefore, if we act but faithfully to Him, He is both mighty and willing to save. But what right have we to plead for this protection? can we pretend a zeal for God, and yet be backward to appear in His sanctuary? Can we pretend to the power of godliness,

liness, without having so much as the form of it? These are contradictions. That these places are so little frequented, is but too plain a proof, that piety is sensibly decayed amongst us; and, oh! that our present danger may quicken and revive it; if it does not, and that speedily too, we have too much reason to fear, that God will give us up as a prey to our enemies; and for the abuse of His mercies too justly deprive us of the use of them. We shall then grow serious; but, alas! too late; for what will it avail them to wish for our liberties, when we have lost them? or to begin then to value the blessings of a free government and a *rational* religion, when we are either bleeding under *persecution*, or dragging under the yoke of *superstition* and *arbitrary power* *?

Let us then, for the sake of ourselves, our families, and our country, as we ever hope for a blessing on us and our posterity; let us, I say, be careful and conscientious in observ-

* Preached during the time of the last rebellion.

ing the Lord's-day ourselves, and in enforcing its observation on those about us. Let us, this day above all, be exemplary in our lives, and holy in our conversations; devoutly meditating on God's word, His works, and His providence; constantly praising Him in private and in public; at home, and in the congregation. O let us ever, on this day, frequent God's house; and never, when invited, neglect his holy table. This is properly to make the Sabbath a sign between God and us; this is indeed to acknowledge Jehovah to be our God. Thus may we piously trust, that the same Power which created, will infallibly redeem us; and be our surest defence in this life, as well as make us immortally happy in that which is to come.

S E R

S E R M O N XIV.

Phil. iii. 17.
Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them, which walk so, as ye have us for an ensample.

HUMAN nature never yet exhibited a compleat pattern of virtue, but in one, viz. our Saviour, who, at the same time, was possessed of the Divine nature too. Many indeed have been reputed righteous, and, in the merciful language of the Gospel, some have been stiled so; when yet, in reality, none are, or can be, good, but by comparison; and he is the best man, whose faults are the fewest. There is no such thing as perfection in this world; even the sun has its spots, and the fairest virtue its blemishes. As therefore there is no man absolutely good, so consequently is no man absolutely to be imi-

tated. However, since the Scripture, in this and several other passages, sets the examples of eminent men before us, as patterns for us to walk by, I hope I shall not be thought to misemploy your time, while I offer to you such rules as seem necessary for our observing them aright, and endeavour to show, what is the proper use to be made of them, as well in those things wherein we *are not*, as in those wherein it is *our duty* to imitate them.

First then, we certainly are not to copy even the best of men in their *faults*.

The Scripture, like a faithful mirror, represents men as they are, without concealing either the merits of some of the worst of men, or the failings of the very best. The characters indeed are found there, as in other writings, to run pretty much in general terms; so that those, whose vices are predominant, notwithstanding some good actions, are denominated wicked; while those, on the contrary, the tenor of whose life is good, notwithstanding some slips, or even notorious trans-

transgressions, are yet ranked amongst the righteous. But certainly we are not to conclude from hence, either that every action in those is to be condemned, or every action in these to be commended. It is the general character of Noah, that he did all that the Lord commanded him; of David, that he was the man after God's own heart; of Solomon, that he was the wisest of the children of men: And yet, we read of the drunkenness of the first; of the adultery and murder of the second; of the sensuality and idolatry of the third. And can we think, that their many excellent virtues were sufficient to sanctify these foul crimes? and that, because they were so eminent in other points, they were therefore justifiable in these? No, surely: and therefore, if neither could they be justified in the practice of them; then certainly neither can we be justified in the imitation of them.

As we are not to imitate the best of men in their sins, so neither is it safe for us to

follow them in such things as are of a *doubtful* nature. Such was that of Lot's prostituting his daughters, to save the angels from violence, Gen. xix. 8. of Jacob's fraudulently snatching the blessing from his brother Esau, Gen. xxviii. 4. of Joseph's swearing by the life of Pharaoh, Gen. xlii. 16. and the like, which being mentioned only as historical facts, without any mark either of censure or approbation fixed upon them, have left much room for disputes among the learned, whether they are justifiable, or not. Now, we are not to imagine that the Scriptures, which are every where so full of the clearest precepts for us to walk by, should leave us to the guidance of such doubtful examples. Nor are we always to imitate those examples, which are even *commended* in Scripture; for either the commendation may be *partial*, and so necessarily ought our imitation to be too; or the action may be too *extraordinary* to serve as a rule for common life.

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For instance: When the unjust steward in the Gospel is commended, because he did wisely; we must remember, that as to his prudence only is he commended, and as to that only is he to be imitated; and if we extend the commendation any farther, we extend it farther than either our Saviour intended, or than reason and Scripture will bear. Would we therefore make such an use of the parable as we ought, we should not be more careful to observe the steward's prudence, that we may follow it, than his injustice, that we may avoid it. Again, Phinehas's zeal in dispatching Zimri and Cosbi, was undoubtedly meritorious; the spirit of God himself bearing witness to it, in these words of the Psalmist, *that it was counted unto him for righteousness unto all generations for evermore*, Psal. cvi. 31. Now, as to the zeal that Phinehas showed in this for God's honour, that doubtless deserves, and even demands, our imitation; but that will by no means serve to justify any other man,
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however actuated by the same zeal, to exert it, either in the same manner, or to the same degree. If he was a private man, yet that can never authorize any other private man to draw the sword of justice, as he did; if he was a magistrate, yet that can never authorize any other magistrate to punish criminals in an extrajudicial way; and to execute them before they are legally condemned. In short, as we find by the context, that, what Phinehas did, was by virtue of a special command, given by God to Moses at that very time; so no man can be warranted to do the like action, till he can produce the like authority for it.

It seems to have been much the same zeal for God's honour that actuated the prophet Elijah, when he prayed for fire down from heaven upon the captains and their companies, and God sufficiently approved his zeal; for his prayers were heard, and the fire came and consumed them. However God's approbation of this in him, was not enough to make

make it a precedent for others; for we find, when James and John afterwards were for having the same power exerted, upon much the same occasion, that our Saviour rebuked them in these words, *Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of, for the Son of man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them,* Luke, ix. 56. The Gospel, it seems, was like its Author, of a meek and merciful spirit; and was therefore not to be maintained but by meek and merciful means. There are many other instances recorded of God's worthies, which being done by virtue of a particular impulse or command from God, were therefore meritorious in them, but by no means to be copied by others, without the same Divine warrant as they had.

Many of these instances mentioned, and many more that might be mentioned, are of too extraordinary a nature to serve as directions in ordinary cases; and others are so mixed and complicated, as that we can never be too cautious in applying them. Their
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commendation may perhaps run in general terms, and yet be meant very partially and particularly. The main substance of an action may sometimes be bad, and yet be commended for the good principle, from which it proceeded; at other times, the action may be praised only for the good effects which it produced. Wherefore we cannot be too cautious in severing the good from the bad, as well to avoid the one, as to follow the other. In a word, in all particular cases, we can never safely make another man's action our rule, till we can make our circumstances exactly the same with his.

The examples of good men, notwithstanding, even in those things wherein they are not to be followed, nay, in those very things wherein they ought to be condemned, may yet prove very much to our advantage. How they may, in some instances, has been shewed already, namely, if we pick out those parts which are certainly good, from those, which are but probably so, and so cultivate the same

holy zeal and affections, which they had, though we venture not to exercise them always to the same degree, as they did. But farther, when we read of the lapses of the greatest and best of men, such as of David, in the matter of Uriah, and of St. Peter, in the denial of his Lord and Master; these, and other such instances as these, may convince us of the frailty of human nature, and check all foolish presumptions that may arise in us, of our own self-sufficiency or security. These considerations must surely teach us not to be high-minded, but fear; and to enforce upon us the usefulness of that advice of St. Paul, *wherefore let him, that thinketh he standeth, take heed, lest he fall,* 1 Cor. x. 12.

And as these may serve to warn us of our danger, so do they naturally excite our caution and vigilance too; that if we would avoid the same sins, we should avoid the same temptations; that we should neither betray ourselves into Satan's power by our negligence, as did David; nor by our rashness, as
did

did St. Peter. Thus we see those examples in Scripture of holy men, even in the worst part of them, their failings and miscarriages, are yet of excellent use, when rightly applied, serving, like those monuments of wrecks scattered up and down the sea, to show us the rocks, on which others have split; that so their perils may become the means of our safety.

But it is time that we now go on, in the *second* place, to consider the more immediate and proper use of examples in those things, wherein it is our duty to imitate them, as it certainly is, wherever the law enjoins our obedience; in which case the law does not more strengthen the example, than the example illustrates the law. We should imitate them then in their faith, their fear, and their love of God; place the same reliance upon His promises, the same hopes in His mercy, and the same confidence in His protection; we should be ready, with them, to submit our wills to His; chearfully to do
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whatever He shall command, and contentedly to suffer whatever He shall inflict; we should have the same religious dread of offending Him by our sin; and, if we have at any time offended Him, the same eager desire of being reconciled again, by an hearty and speedy repentance.

With regard to our neighbour, we should endeavour not to come behind the most eminent of the saints, either in our justice or charity; forbearing to do even the least injury to any; and willing to do the best offices we can to all; nay, even where we have received an injury ourselves, to return it generally with pity or forgiveness, but certainly never with revenge.

With relation to ourselves, we should learn of them to get, if possible, an absolute command over our passions; so as that, whatever our circumstances or conditions of life may be, we may behave ourselves suitably in all; neither insolent in the highest, nor dejected in the lowest; chaste and pure in all our words,

words, thoughts, and desires; keeping the body ever in due subjection to the soul; and bearing such an entire indifference to the things of this world, as plainly to show we expect an inheritance in the next.

And towards the producing and confirming of all these several virtues in us, we shall find that the examples of good men have an admirable tendency, both as they serve to convince us of the *possibility* of our duty, and to *animate* us to the practice of it.

First, they serve to convince us of the *possibility* of our duty. So pure and spiritual a religion as Christianity is, must needs, in many instances, be very grating to flesh and blood, and according to the present state of corrupt nature therefore, very difficult to be practised. Now, in cases of great difficulty, nothing is more common than for men to fancy them impossible; and to fancy them impossible, is the ready way to make them so. It must needs cramp our endeavours, to imagine, that our endeavours will prove ineffectual;

fectual ; and a man will easily satisfy himself with doing nothing, if he can once bring himself to believe, that all he does will be to no purpose. But now the force of example is enough to beat down all such imaginations ; since whatever others, in our circumstances, have done, is certainly possible for us to do. And can we then be attacked with any temptation of any kind, either of pleasure or pain, that may either flatter our hopes, or alarm our fears ; that may either allure us into sin, or terrify us from our duty, but what has been resisted by many good and holy men before us, and which therefore may be resisted by us too, if we will but use the same means of resistance as they did ?

Thus, let ill example be ever so prevalent, yet let us not pretend to say, that it cannot be withstood ; for how did *Lot* maintain his innocence in the midst of a large and numerous city, wherein were scarce ten righteous men besides himself ? and, to go still farther, how did *Noah* remain almost alone untainted,

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whilst

whilst all the world was infected about him?

Can we suppose vice to be ever more dangerous, than when backed with interest, honour, and authority? than when insinuating itself under the luxury, and set off with all the splendour of a court? and yet in this dress did it appear to *Moses*; but he saw through its deformity, and detested it: *refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; and esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, Heb. xi. 14, 15, 16.*

Perhaps there is no passion more impatient to be gratified, or more hard to be quelled, than that of revenge, especially where the injury is great, and the injurer still has it in his power to repeat it, and there is all the reason besides to think, that he will; in which case, it seems defensible on the principle of self-preservation, and wherein a man,
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that should neglect it, would be thought, by many, to seem wanting, in point of justice, to himself. And yet how did *David* act, in these very circumstances, towards Saul, his merciless enemy? Why, he scorned to take revenge on his enemy, though he might have done it with safety; nay, though his safety seemed to require him to do it; and though he might have gratified his ambition with a crown at the same time.

Can we pretend that poverty, reproach, and persecution are burthens upon no account to be borne, when yet we read of those, who *having nothing*, yet reckoned themselves as *possessing all things*; of those, who *gloried in their shame*; of others, who *were tortured, not accepting the deliverance*; and of others still, who not only submitted to death contentedly, but even met it cheerfully; not only patient sufferers for religion, but willing martyrs for it too?

And in this particular, namely, to evince the *possibility* of our duty, the examples of

good men are perhaps the best proofs that can be given. Our Saviour's is undoubtedly the only compleat pattern; nor are we to be followers of even the best of men, any farther than as they are followers of Christ. But then, however our Saviour has been pleased to familiarize his example to us by assuming our nature, yet we should be apt, whenever we remembered that he was God as well as man, to conclude, that many things must needs be possible for *Him*, which are impossible for *us*; and therefore, in very pressing temptations, by distrusting our power to resist them, we should, notwithstanding his example, be too often discouraged, and perhaps think ourselves excused too, from attempting it. But when we see men of the same passions and infirmities with ourselves, assaulted by the same temptations as we are, and yet mastering them, we can then make the plea of impossibility no longer; and, that once removed, all the main obstacles to action will, of course, be removed with it;

so that the examples of good men are not more useful to convince us of the *possibility* of our duty, than they are, *secondly*, to encourage us to the practice of it.

There is a native comeliness in virtue, which makes it need only to be seen, in order to be admired; and a natural emulation in men, what they admire, to imitate. It is this principle that sets all the powers of the soul on work, and impels a man to act often even beyond himself. It is thus, that the example of a brave leader many times influences every soldier under his command, till, by degrees, the same spirit animates the whole army like one man, and every one is ready alike to expose his life the first; the sense of danger either being entirely lost, or serving but as a spur to quicken his ambition the more. Would we acquit ourselves as well in our spiritual warfare, it will become us, in the same manner, to have an eye on our spiritual Leaders, on those who *have fought a good fight, have finished their course, and have kept the*

faith; and, if we keep them in our view, we shall probably grow like them in our practice. We shall think it a disgrace for us to desert the path, which they have trod before; and to sink under those pressures, over which they triumphed. At the least, what they did, should naturally make us exert our utmost endeavours to do the same; and we all know how different things seem in speculation, to what they prove upon trial; they may be very difficult in the apprehension, and yet easy enough in the execution; and towards the rendering of them so, the setting of such bright patterns before us, will very much contribute, by representing virtue so amiable, as that we shall either overlook all the difficulties attending it, or at least so as that difficulties shall be no discouragements.

These seem to be the main designs of God, in proposing examples to us, and these the natural effects that our observing of them *should* have upon us, viz. to convince us of the *pos-*

possibility of our *duty*, and to *animate* us to the *practice* of it.

That these gracious designs therefore may not be defeated, nor these good effects lost upon us, let us think of such examples frequently, and in all cases apply and urge them home to ourselves; that whenever any temptation assaults us, we may immediately recollect who has been assaulted in the same manner, and yet came off victorious. Let us consider, not only how such a patriarch, prophet, apostle, or first Christian would have behaved, but how actually he did behave, upon such or such an occasion. Thus shall each example have its proper use, either to subdue in us some vice, or to excite in us some virtue. Thus shall the meekness of *Moses* serve as a remedy to check in us all the swellings of pride, or transports of anger; and *David's* behaviour towards *Saul*, shame us out of the low and mean spirit of revenge. Let a man be bereaved, even as *Job* was, of health, fortune, and friends at once; yet let

him but remember what Job, in those circumstances, said, and he himself also will be ready, with the same pious resignation, to say, *The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away, blessed be the name of the Lord, Job i. 21.*

Lastly, That we may be able to come up to these patterns, which Scripture proposes to us, in the hardest instances of duty, let us constantly keep in mind, as they did, that eternal happiness which is to be the reward of it. That consideration it was, which chiefly supported them in their afflictions, and must therefore support us in ours. Thus in Heb. x. 34. it is said, *They took joyfully the spoiling of their goods; knowing in themselves, that they had in heaven a better and more enduring substance.* That we may therefore sit as loose to this world as they did, let our conversation be in heaven, as theirs was. Thus, in another place, says St. Paul, 2 Cor. iv. 14—16. *Knowing that He which raised up the Lord Jesus, shall raise us up also by Jesus. For which cause we faint not; but though our*
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outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. Nay, so far were they from fainting under, that we find they even rejoiced in their tribulations, being assured that their light affliction, which was but for a moment, would work for them a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. And no doubt of it, all the calamities of this world, be they how great soever, are yet nothing in the balance against an eternity of compleat bliss. A belief then of such a future state as this, must certainly be the best natural means of bearing us up under the evils of the present; but what is still much better, such a faith as this will entitle us to the protection of heaven, and the assistance of the Divine Grace.

To conclude all in a word, let us constantly look up to the Author and Finisher of our faith; let us consider what He suffered, and what He hath prepared for us, and then shall we find no duty, no temptation too hard for us; we shall be able to do all things through
Christ,

Christ, that strengtbens us; we shall be glad to suffer any thing with Him, or for Him, in this transitory life, that we may reign with Him in the life everlasting.

S E R M O N XV.

P H I L. ii. 15.

—*That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world.*

TH E S E words were originally addressed by St. Paul to the whole body of Christians then in general; and with regard to them at that time, so remarkable was their zeal and integrity, that this character of *shining as lights in the world* might be applied to them in general with the greatest propriety. This expression however may admit of some little variation in sense, according as it may be differently rendered, either *ye shine*, or *shine ye*, as lights in the world; but whether it be taken by way of commendation or exhortation, the doctrine from the text will be still the same, viz. that, as Christianity affords
better

better means of making men eminently good, irreproachable in the sight of God and man, than any other religion in the world can, so does it lay the strongest obligations upon all its professors to become so.

Now, that the first Christians were men of this conspicuous character, is a matter of fact notorious and undeniable. And indeed how should it be otherwise? for their religion was plainly the religion of reason and conviction; not the effect of authority, prepossession, or prejudice. Their prejudices must have been all on the other side of the question; but, being men of honest minds, they could not stand out against the miracles wrought in defence of it; these carried sensible demonstrations of a supernatural Power along with them; and therefore, when the workers of them declared, that they had received their commission from God, they rationally concluded, that from God they must have received it; for God, as a God of truth, could never set his seal to a falshood. Thus were
their

their ears open to all the instructions, which should come from such inspired teachers; and accordingly, as the word of God found a free and easy admission into their hearts, so with it did every Christian grace and virtue naturally take root, and grow up in them. But the main foundation of all their faith and virtue was this, the late and incontestable fact of our Saviour's resurrection, which was a full confirmation of all that He had ever said or taught; that He came from God; was the Son of God; of the same Divine nature with Him, Himself very God; and consequently that, as He had raised Himself from the dead, He was able to raise them also, and from His declarations therefore infallibly would. And this was a foundation for their faith firm and immoveable; by this were they enabled to encounter all difficulties and dangers; to withstand all assaults and temptations. With heaven and eternal happiness in view; nothing in all nature could have charms enough to allure them from their duty;

duty ; nothing, no not death itself could carry terror enough to force them from it.

And yet these men, eminent and exemplary as they were, did the apostle advise to become more eminent and exemplary still ; that they should be *blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom they were to shine as lights in the world.* Now these words seem to respect their conduct chiefly with regard to men ; that, as their new profession would certainly draw the eyes of the world upon them, so their characters should be able to stand the strictest scrutiny ; that, as they lived amongst enemies, who would gladly catch hold of any handle for reproach, so they should be more than ordinarily cautious not to give any just one ; that, as they were stiled *Sons of God*, so they should assert their right to that title by an unspotted holiness of life and integrity of manners ; and by shewing in all their behaviour, that they exercised themselves to have a conscience void of offence,

fence, as well towards man, as towards God. And these cautions were no more than necessary; for we find, that disputes and animosities began to spring up very early among them; partly from their addiction each to their several teachers; partly from some mistaken notions, that prevailed about the nature of Christian liberty, which some were unreasonably for contracting too much, and others as unwarrantably for extending too far; and probably from many other reasons, well known at that time, though not so easily to be assigned by us at this distance. Besides their zeal (which is an active principle, and apt therefore, without great caution, to overleap the bounds of moderation) might prompt them now and then, even from a glowing sense of God's honour, too much to disregard and despise the tongues and opinions of those about them; and to make them, so that they could but satisfy their own consciences in what they *did*, not to consult enough either the times, the occasions,

sions, or the manner of *doing* it; in which yet the great beauty of holiness consists, and on which must depend too its chief influence and success. It might tempt them too, as they saw they were to expect no countenance from the civil power, sometimes too unwarily to offend and exasperate it; and, from an eagerness of bearing testimony to the truth, instead of declining danger (which, without a proper call, is ever our duty to do) too rashly to run themselves into the way of it.

With regard to us at this time, little caution, I fear, is necessary from any overflowing of our zeal; in this respect it is certain, that we want much rather to be quickened than restrained; though were our zeal ever so much more active and animated than it is, yet (blessed be God) we need be under no apprehensions upon that account; since it is our happiness to live in a country, where Christianity is the religion professed, and has the civil authority on its side.

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Now the reason of the difference in this particular between us and the first Christians is plainly this, that they, as I said before, became converts upon conviction; whereas we are, in a great measure, Christians, as it were, by birth, and the custom of the age and place we live in; in which case, as we take up our notions hereditarily, so are we apt to examine them but superficially; contenting ourselves too much with the bare profession of our religion, without giving ourselves the trouble thoroughly to search into the grounds of it.

But things ought to be otherwise; and this will be so far from being our excuse, that it will but aggravate our condemnation. The sacred oracles of truth lie open before us, and be it at our own peril therefore, if we neglect to consult them. We have most authentic records of those miracles, which first ushered Christianity into the world; and which are the same to us, as they were to the eye-witnesses of them, and will continue to

be to all future ages, undeniable tests of the truth of it. It is true, we do not see them performed as they did ; we have not the same ocular demonstration, which they had ; but we have all the proofs of them, which, in the nature of things, matters of this kind are capable of ; which, though not visible and sensible, are yet equally certain, as if they were. Besides, we have other proofs in defence of Christianity, which must have been wanting to them ; as namely, the amazing propagation of the Gospel over so vast an extent of country, and in so short a space of time, against all the learning, the power, and the malice of the world combined against it ; by, seemingly, the weakest means, and, humanly speaking, the most disproportioned instruments ; itself the greatest of miracles.

We might appeal likewise to many prophecies fulfilled, which of course must have been hid from those of former ages, and which could have been discovered only by their accomplishment ; a miracle this too,
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which manifestly bears the Divine stamp upon it; for certainly to foreknow *future* events, must be the property of God alone, to whom all things are *present*.

And shall we then not search the Scriptures, which come thus authentically and miraculously attested to us? If we do not, we plainly prove it to be merely casual with regard to us, that we are not Jews, Mahometans or Infidels; and as to any advantages from Christianity, we might full as well have been so.

But I hope for better things; that we shall all thankfully improve the happy privilege of our birth into all the advantages for which Providence designed it; that we shall not content ourselves with being nominal Christians only, like heirs to a title, without any substance at all to support it; but convince the world, that we are become Christians in deed and in truth, upon mature choice and well-grounded principles; by studying the Scriptures with that assiduity, attention, and

zeal, which are suitable to their worth and importance. And surely no other system of religion can deserve our care and attention so well; for no other can so fully instruct us in the knowledge, either of the Divine nature, or our own; can prescribe so pure a form of worship, or so compleat a rule of practice; can afford such assistances, or propose such rewards. It is foreign to my present design, as, with regard to the audience I am before, it would be needless, to enter upon a laboured proof of these points; the truth of which must be evident to every one, who will form but the slightest comparison between Christianity and any other religion in the world.

As to the Gentiles, who had nothing but the light of nature to direct them, and that too miserably diminished of its original brightness, it is no wonder, that their worship should be so defective, when their notions of the Deity were so depraved; they not only believed a plurality of gods, but likewise held many for such, who, from their
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lewdness, intemperance, and cruelty, would have been justly looked upon as monsters even amongst men. We may be sure that the rites of their worship were suited to the objects of it; and what then must the lives of such votaries be expected to be? It is true indeed, the more learned of them, and who, by their parts and application, had made a deeper search into nature, discovered worthier sentiments of God and his attributes; but though some of them pretty plainly appear to have believed but one Supreme God; yet not any of them, no, not the best and wisest of them all, could free himself from the idolatry of the times; but gave a strong confirmation to it, by declaring at his death, that he had always worshipped the gods according to the usage of his country.

With regard to the Jews, whose religion came from Divine inspiration, and was designed to be a type of Christianity, and the shadow of heavenly things to come, one might have expected better things from them;

but, as they had always been a *crooked* and *perverse* people, so they became every day more and more vitiated from the corrupt doctrines and practices of their elders; who, by their multiplied traditions, had well nigh rendered the law of none effect; and buried, as it were, the spirit of their religion under the rubbish of superstitious rights and carnal ordinances. Besides the sanctions of their law were of a temporal nature; and but dim, in comparison, was their prospect of the immortality of the soul, and a future state of rewards and punishments; which yet alone are strong enough to bind men to a constant and uniform course of obedience, and which were never fully brought to light but by the Gospel.

As Christianity appears to this advantage, when compared with any other religion, so will it appear to the same advantage still, if compared, as it is maintained by us of the reformed church in its genuine purity, with the many errors and corruptions of the church
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of Rome; wherein such doctrines are publicly professed, as are contrary to the whole tenor and design of the Gospel; destructive of all the principles of piety, justice, and charity; and injurious no less to the honour of God, and the merits of our Redeemer, than to the peace and welfare of society, and the common rights and liberties of mankind. Nor indeed can it well be accounted for otherwise, how any people should be held in so slavish a subjection to such absurd and impious notions, than by their being debarred the free use of the Scriptures, and by having their service locked up from them in an unknown tongue.

But this is very far from being our case. With us, all the offices of the church are performed in our native tongue; and therefore, as the service itself is reasonable, so may we all rationally bear a part in it. Besides, the free use of the Scriptures is not only allowed, but enjoined us; and every one, who can read, may *there* see with his own eyes the

mystery of his redemption laid open to him; may *there* learn, how man was originally formed, from what a state he fell, and by what means he was restored; how his reconciliation with God, and the pardon of his sins (which, of himself, he could never have been entitled to, could never have had any solid grounds to hope for) were effected by the all-sufficient merits of God incarnate dying for him; may *there* behold, in one view, the most perfect rule of life, whether regarding God, his neighbour, or himself, laid down in the plainest manner, and illustrated by the brightest example, even that of our Saviour; together with the promise of the Divine Grace to assist him in his duty; and of everlasting happiness, to reward him for it. The consequence of all which is plainly this, that Christianity obliges its professors to excel all other men as much in the purity of their lives, as that excels all other religions in the purity of its doctrines.

Indeed

Indeed for what end else could God be supposed, either to vouchsafe us the light of the Gospel, or to permit his blessed Son, in our nature, to suffer for us? It was doubtless for this, to shew his hatred to sin, and love to mankind; to abolish the one, in order to save the other. This is the doctrine of every page almost in the Gospel; to this, all its precepts, all its promises, and all its threatenings tend.

This, says St. Paul, is a *faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*, 1 Tim. i. 15. Here is plainly declared the gracious end of our Saviour's coming; but how to save them? why, by freeing them, as we are elsewhere taught, from the guilt and dominion of sin; for *for this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil*, 1 Joh. iii. 8. But the doctrine and terms of our salvation are no where more fully declared to us than in Tit. ii. 11, &c. *The grace of God, that bringeth salvation, hath*
ap-

appeared to all men, teaching us, that denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world; looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works. Where we may observe, that all the hopes we can have from the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ, depend on this condition, that *we live righteously, soberly, and godly in this present world.* Christ gave himself for us for this very purpose, that he might *redeem us from all iniquity*; if therefore we still continue obstinate in the practice of it, we defeat, what we can, the end of Christ's first coming; and how then can we expect any advantages from His second?

I shall not think it needful to recite any of the precepts of the Gospel, which are plain and obvious to all; or to enlarge on its
pro-

promises, which the meanest Christian, that ever looked into the Gospel, must perceive to be all conditional ;—that the Divine Grace is to be expected only in aid of our own best endeavours ;—that Christ's merits are available only in conjunction with a sound faith ;—and that happiness is annexed only to a life of unfinning obedience, or at least to an unfeigned repentance.

As to the godly alone all the promises of the Gospel are made, so against the ungodly are all its threatenings denounced ; so that, as the greater will be our reward, if we punctually perform God's will ; so the heavier will our punishment be, if we wilfully transgress it ; eternal the reward ; and eternal the punishment.

I need not sure add, that our obligations increase in proportion to our knowledge ; and that many things, which would be passed by uncensured or unnoticed in a poor and illiterate Christian, would reflect a shame and dishonour upon those of sounder sense, and more
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improved capacities. It might justly be expected from them, as they are better judges of the fit times and seasons, the due force and propriety of action, to set every virtue off in its fairest light, and to make religion appear every way amiable. Where to superior knowledge is added a superior rank and eminence in life, there the obligations become stronger still; that such, whose examples will have a great and extensive influence, may, for that reason, make their examples as useful as possible; and endeavour to be an honour to religion, as religion will certainly be an honour to them.

But of all men living, it doubtless behoves the Clergy most to excel both in the knowledge and the practice of their duty; indeed it would be doubly criminal in them to be defective in either. They have, in a peculiar manner, dedicated themselves to the service of God; and accordingly, as their function exempts them from the hurry and fatigue of secular employments, they have the more
leisure

leisure to attend to, and must be therefore self-condemned, if they neglect the grand concerns of a better life. Besides, unto them are committed the oracles of God; nor can true faith and sound morals be long preserved amongst any people, but by the united influence of their *learning* and *example*.

Very different is the case of the preachers of the Gospel now, from that of the first publishers of it. They were actuated (and necessary it was that they should be actuated) by Divine inspiration; but God, having once established the Gospel by miracles, left it to be supported afterwards by the more ordinary methods of grace, and the joint use of reason and learning. And surely no common pains are requisite to qualify a man to understand the Scriptures in their original languages; duly to compare the Old and New Testament together, and to see how they mutually confirm and illustrate each other; to acquaint himself with the history of those early times, and the particular errors and
objec-

objections; which the apostles had then to combat; accurately to explain each Christian doctrine, and rightly to state the bounds of each Christian duty; by all honest arts of address to infuse knowledge into the ignorant, to comfort the afflicted, to confirm the wavering, and to satisfy the scrupulous; by the terrors of the Lord to reclaim those, whose lives are a scandal to our religion; and, by solid arguments, to refute those, who professedly set themselves against it.

It is not indeed to be expected, that every one, who is called to the Ministry, can have either opportunities or abilities sufficient for all these qualifications; but it is certainly the duty of every one to be possessed of as many of them as he can; and of those who can, to be possessed of them all; and (for the credit of our profession be it said) it would not be difficult to point out many, that are.

But it is a good *example* at last, that must crown all other qualities. Without this, all the learning in the world will be to little pur-

purpose, and the best preaching prove but as *sounding brass*, or a *tinkling cymbal*. The force of our doctrine will depend upon the tenor of our lives; and have a greater or less influence upon others, according to the influence it shall appear to have upon ourselves. A preacher of righteousness will naturally be expected to practise it too; and if he does not, the reproach, that falls upon him, will not rest there; but be turned by many to the discredit of his function; by many to the discredit of Christianity itself. Great reason therefore have we to follow the apostle's advice in *walking in wisdom toward them that are without*, Col. iv. 5. and to copy his example, in *behaving ourselves holily, justly, and unblameably among them that believe*, 1 Thess. ii. 10. Now, by this unblameable sanctity mentioned both here and in my text, the apostle can never be thought sure to mean any preciseness or singularity of carriage; much less any supercilious and unsociable severity of life; which would tend rather to disparage religion, than

than to recommend it; on the contrary, perhaps in general to comply with the world in things indifferent, would be the likeliest means to give us a weight and authority in those things, wherein it is our duty to oppose it. In short, how strenuous soever we ought to be in maintaining all the great articles of Christianity; and how strict soever in conforming our own lives to the rules of it; yet should we be ever easy, humble, and affable; candid, benevolent, and charitable to all men. Even there, where we are obliged, by our office, to reprove, rebuke, or exhort others, we should still do it in such a manner, as to shew, that we are friends to the men, while we are enemies to their vices; and, with regard to those, whose principles and sentiments are most opposite to our own, we should yet differ from them with temper, like men, and like Christians. So shall we cut off all occasion, at least all just occasion, of reproach; prove ourselves to be, as far as it is possible for us to be, *sons of God without rebuke*;

rebuke; and effectually answer the character of shining as lights in the world.

A more particular application of what has been said might reasonably be deemed as unnecessary to men of the first stations in the church, as it would certainly be unbecoming from one of mine. Instead therefore of reciting any of the episcopal duties and qualifications, which St. Paul, in his epistles to Timothy and Titus, hath so largely described, I shall conclude this discourse with beseeching Almighty God, that, as He hath, of His infinite mercy, favoured us of this nation with the knowledge of the purest religion upon earth, so it would please Him to raise up a continual succession of men duly qualified for the administration of the same, under whose guidance, and by His blessing, it may be preserved pure and unsullied to the latest posterity; and to this end, may God so direct his Majesty, that he may appoint always such persons to the government of the Church, as, by their learning, wisdom, and piety, may

be able to do the most credit to *him*; and most honour to that faith of which he is not only the avowed defender by his title, but also (what may he long, very long continue to be) an illustrious ornament by his example.

Now to God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, be ascribed, as is most due, all honour, glory, might, majesty, and dominion, now and for evermore.

S E R-

S E R M O N XVI.

J A M E S .iii. 16.

Where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

OF all the ill qualities, which frail man is incident to, there is hardly any one that carries more folly and baseness along with it; that makes a man more uneasy to himself and hateful to others; that argues more enmity to man and unthankfulness to God; in a word, that is more opposite both to nature and grace, than envy. Self-preservation is the first principle of human nature, and upon this is ingrafted the love of our neighbour, since our mutual relations and dependencies may convince us, that we can never seek our own good so effectually as in conjunction with that of others: but now envy acts directly the contrary to this rule; it makes us so far from wishing the welfare of others, as to pine at

the very sight of it; and to make us look upon another's felicity as our misfortune. The ordinary calamities of life are so many, that common prudence would tell us, all the assistance we can get is too little to secure us from them; but now the envious person is so far from calling in the assistance of others, that he sets them at enmity against him; and at the same time, as if the common evils of life were not enough of themselves, is continually multiplying them; and, by a miraculous instance of folly, creating to himself a world of new ones, which, in the course of nature and providence, would have never come in his way. He acts the very reverse of God, in bringing evil out of good, and turning the blessings of others into curses upon himself. In short, he is a common enemy to God and man, envying the prosperity of the one, and murmuring at the dispensations of the other; nor could any punishment therefore be too bad for him, could any worse be thought of than what he inflicts upon himself. But not

to wander too long in generals, I shall go on more particularly to consider,

First, The nature of envy.

Secondly, The folly of it.

Thirdly, The sinfulness of it.

Fourthly, I shall add such remedies as may be most effectual to prevent it.

First then for the nature of envy. Now the general definition of *envy* is this, that it is *an uneasiness of mind at the real or supposed good of another*; which definition is true indeed as far as it goes, but not compleat, as neither expressing the whole of envy, nor distinguishing it enough from such other uneasinesses of mind, as, if exercised upon proper occasions, and within due bounds, are certainly allowable.

For instance, if I see a dangerous power lodged in an enemy's hands, I have reason to be uneasy at it from the just apprehension of its consequences to myself; but now, if this uneasiness turns only upon a concern for my own welfare, without my either desiring or

designing any injury to him, this is certainly
 not envy, but fear, which is a necessary prin-
 ciple of self-preservation. Again; if a man sees another, who set out
 into the world upon the same footing with
 himself, by the due exercise of his parts and
 abilities, become vastly his superior, he may
 with great reason be dissatisfied at the sight;
 and provided that this dissatisfaction arises
 from a sense, not of the advantages which
 the other enjoys, but what he himself wants,
 and justly charges it to his own neglect, that
 he does want them, and puts him not at
 all upon lessening the other, but only upon
 improving himself, this is not envy, but emu-
 lation; which if guarded from those little
 heart-burnings, that too frequently attend it,
 is a noble disposition of mind, and the parent
 of almost every thing that is great and ex-
 cellent. Again, to see men of worth and virtue ge-
 nerally discountenanced, and mean and vicious
 persons carested and rewarded, might certainly
 justify

justify the warmest resentment and uneasiness; which uneasiness, should it not arise from any fond conceit of a man's own merit being neglected; nor a partial view to his own advancement; nor push him out of his own sphere upon any unwarrantable attempts to regulate it; would certainly deserve a much better name than that of envy, being indeed no other than a generous indignation springing from the love of virtue and the public good.

To compleat, therefore, the definition of envy, and to confine so odious a name to what alone it belongs, it will be proper to add, that as envy is an uneasiness of mind, conceived upon the sight of another's good; so it is upon the sight of such a good especially, as is no ways detrimental to the person envying.

Thus, whence that envying amongst the labourers in the parable? Was it because they had received less than their due? No. But only because some were thought to have received more; and therefore those who could

not but own the justice of their doom to themselves; could yet not bear to see his liberality to others. Thus what injury to Haman to see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the king's gate and yet this sight alone was sufficient to render all the dainties, the splendours, and the honours of a court insipid to him, unhappy only in this, that poor Mordecai seemed happy too.

Is a man raised, whether by favour or fortune, or by his acknowledged worth and abilities? yet let him by what means soever become eminent, and he must expect envy as a tax to be laid upon him for being so. Is a man rich? then, let him have been ever so industrious in acquiring his wealth, envy will be still as industrious to prevent his enjoyment of it. In short, envy will never be at rest, while there is any object for it to work upon; that is, while there is any such thing as prosperity in the world. Now, if envy were to spend itself only upon the breast that harbours it, that were but a proper punishment

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to the man himself; and no great harm to the rest of mankind; abuses in his inwardly in grief; for it keeps itself outwardly in hatred too; and the envious person is never so uneasy to himself, as when he is least capable of doing mischief to others. The malice of his heart will not stop in vain wishes and desires, but go on to malicious designs and resolutions. His tongue will be ready, by all the arts of calumny, to asperse the envied person's name; and his hand, as occasion serves, to offer violence to either his property or his person. If possible, he would have no superior or equal, none above him or about him, nor hardly any beneath him, unless that he might have those to exercise his pride upon, over whose miseries he might triumph. Such an one, if he might have his will, would be like a great storm in the world, breaking and bearing down whatever stands in its way, the greatness of which is to be measured only from the extent of its ruin. Nay, envy is of so diabolical a nature, as that it will often

make

make a man willingly suffer an injury only for the satisfaction of doing one; and even ruin himself, so that he may but compass the ruin of him, whom, for no other reason than his good success, he looks upon as his enemy. A true copy of Satan himself, who, out of envy to see the happiness of man, was resolved to work him out of Paradise, though he was sure to encrease his own perdition by it.

Having now considered the nature of envy, I shall go on, *secondly*, to shew the folly of it, by observing what are the *objects* of envy in the person *envied*, and the *effects* of it upon the person *envying*.

Now the objects of it are all outward advantages whatsoever, which in general may be reduced to the riches, the pleasures, and the honours, of this world. I purposely wave mentioning all endowments of mind, because I take them to be envied, not so much for their own sakes, as for those outward advantages which usually attend them.

1. Then

IV. Then, with regard to *riches*. Has a man reaped them as the fruits of his virtuous industry? then should they quicken our emulation only. Or has he received them as the wages of sin? they then should excite our pity rather. Again, has he health, or a heart, to enjoy them? if not health, then the poor day-labourer may be happier than he, though possessed of his thousands: if not a heart to make use of them, he is then as poor as if he wanted them, and more miserable, in that he lives under a continual anxiety in keeping them, and a constant dread of losing them. On the contrary, if he has a generosity of soul to impart them, mankind is then the better for him, and he deserves rather to be praised than envied. And indeed, excepting where abundance is employed to this end, all beyond what will supply a man with the necessities and comforts of life, is to be looked upon no better than as an useless superfluity.

Again, as to the *pleasures* of life. Now it must be observed that those, which are most natural,

natural, and consequently the most valuable, are the most common too. The sun shines with the same lustre on the cottage as the court; and strikes with the same sensation on the peasant as the prince. The fields appear with as rich a verdure to one man as another, and all the agreeable objects of nature are seen and enjoyed by all alike. Now certainly that which is a common blessing to all, ought not to be made a mark of envy in any.

But here is perhaps one who lives at his ease, with his houses and gardens of pleasure, and with all the plenty and variety, that either nature or art can afford. Now the man who has these is a perpetual eye-sore to the envious man who wants them. But why so? a small tenement will be able to keep the body from the injuries of the weather, as well as the stateliest building; and as for the soul, what is the most pompous structure to that, which even the world itself is too little to satisfy? Then, as to the country, it may be looked upon itself as a natural garden, which generally

natural and consequently the most valuable
rally has more variety, though less regularity
in it, than an artificial one. But then, alas!
it is common; whereas the envious man is all
for the inclosure, nor likes any thing but
what he can call his own; though were it
ever so much his own, yet every guest, every
servant, every passenger, will come in for some
share of the enjoyment.

Then, as to the table of such an one, it is
less to be envied still; for the only real plea-
sure of eating and drinking, arises from the
satisfying of those natural appetites of hunger
and thirst, which a person, pined with abun-
dant, must needs be a stranger to; whereas
the only use of luxury is to raise a false appe-
tite, for want of a true one: and as there is
more pleasure in a plain and moderate diet, so
is there certainly more health in it too.

3. Then as for *honours*. If by these be
meant superior rank and pre-eminence, per-
haps he of the whole community, who de-
serves to be envied least, is the greatest. This
is certain, that the higher a man stands, the

more

more dangerous is his situation, and the greater will be his fall. If we mean by honour, a good name and the applause of the world; what is popular fame but a bubble that's broken in an instant? In short, does a man owe his honour to fortune, or his merit? If to fortune, let us consider how fickle that is, and how little to be depended upon; if to his merit, let us remember his pains, and then we shall not be too forward to envy him his purchase.

We have seen the folly of envy with regard to those things which are generally the objects of it; the folly of it will appear still plainer, by considering its effects on the envious person himself.

Now one of the chief grounds of envy is this, that a man cannot bear a superior; and yet no man can envy another, but, by envying, he acknowledges him to be so, and actually makes the superiority still greater and more conspicuous. How naturally framed for society we are, appears in nothing more than
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in this, that by communication all the evils of life are lessened, and all its enjoyments doubled; whereas the envious person, by being a separatist from society, doubles all the afflictions of life, and cuts himself off from all its enjoyments. How easy and affluent soever his own circumstances may be, they will yet be insipid to him, while he sees others easy and affluent about him; for still his chief misery is another's happiness. Hence all his malicious thoughts, his opprobrious speeches, his injurious actions, which as they manifest his hatred to, so they seldom fail of procuring him the hatred of, mankind in return. Hence that incessant uneasiness, which, like a vulture, preys upon his mind, and is often visible even in his countenance; for still envy is generally so just as to set a mark upon the man, whom it concerns the rest of mankind to know and to shun: and now what can they the folly of envy more than that it makes a man odious to the world, and a perpetual torment to himself, merely by grudging that happiness to others,

others, which, if he had but good-nature, he himself might share in, and improve his own happiness by. But what still infinitely adds to the folly of envy is this, that it renders the envious person odious to God as well as man; so that his torment here is but an earnest of what he is to expect hereafter, which will be evident, by considering, under my *Third* general head, the *sinfulness* of it; for that envy is a sin is plain, by what law soever we try it, whether *natural, civil, or divine*.

Now, is it not the common voice of nature, that we should do to others the same as we expect from others? Who is there that would not complain upon receiving an injury, and would not he therefore be self-condemned, should he offer to do one? There is no one but would be glad to have his own reputation untouched, his own property and person secure; and with what face then can he presume to violate the reputation, the property, or the person of another? But now the envious person acts in direct opposition to this rule.

rule. No one more ready than he to resent the slightest trespass, or more forward to do even the greatest injury; angry often without any cause, and revengeful beyond all bounds.

As envy is contrary to the common law of nature, so is it against all the laws of civil society also; for *where envy is, there is confusion and every evil work.* Nor need we any farther proof to shew how opposite envy is to all the laws of society, than this one, that, were envy to have its full scope, it were impossible for any society to subsist.

But more fully to shew the sinfulness of it, let us try it by the laws of religion. Now it appears, both from reason and revelation, that whatever distinctions there may be of men into high and low, rich and poor, they are all the allotments of God's providence, who *bringeth low, and lifteth up*; consequently no one can envy another any advantages whatsoever, but, at the same time, he must reproach his Maker too. He is, in effect, for dethroning God, and assuming the government of the

world to himself, which, whether it be more ridiculous or impious, is hard to determine.

But to shew its sinfulness in the strongest light, we will try it both by the example and the precepts of Christ, and the whole tenour and design of Christianity.

1. Then as to his *example*. Now He, tho' *in the form of God*, and tho' He *thought it no robbery to be equal with God*, yet took upon Him *the form of a servant*, Phil. ii. 6. *i. e.* took human nature upon Him, with all the most painful and ignominious circumstances imaginable: and what was His whole life here but one continued scene of doing good, good in the utmost extent of the word, both to the souls and bodies of men: nay, even to those very men from whom, at the same time, He himself endured the greatest of evils? But His love triumphed over all difficulties, and made Him submit to death with pleasure, since it was to be attended with man's redemption. And how then can we profess ourselves followers of Christ, and yet be envious and malicious

licious one to another? How extremely incongruous must be such a practice with such a profession?

Nor is it less contrary to the *example* than the plainest *precepts* of Christ. *This*, saith He, *is my commandment that ye love one another, as I have loved you*, John xv. 12. A motive so engaging, as, one would think, must needs prevail: for sure 'tis next to impossible to remember, as we ought, His infinite love to us, and not to love our brethren for His sake; especially since He hath made love the distinguishing mark of a true Christian; *by this shall all men know, that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another*, John xiii. 35.

And, indeed, what is the church of Christ but one large body, of which Christ is the head; wherein, as in the natural body, all the members have a necessary connexion with and dependence upon each other; so that the good of the whole must subsist by a due harmony and agreement of the several parts; so that whether one member suffer, all the mem-

bers should suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members should rejoice with it. But how opposite to this is the spirit of envy, which makes a man pine at his neighbour's felicity, and rejoices over his calamity? and, in a word, does all that lies in its power to put an end to Christianity, and to defeat all the gracious designs of our Saviour's coming into the world? And now, when we see it to be so direct a violation of all the laws of common equity, civil society, and God's general providence; and particularly so contrary both to the example and precepts of Christ, and the whole tenour and spirit of the Gospel, we cannot sure but acknowledge it to be a sin, and a very grievous one too; and accordingly we find it numbered in that black catalogue of sins in Gal. v. of which it is said, that they who do such things, *shall not inherit the kingdom of God.*

If then we are duly sensible of the sinfulness and danger of envy, I hope we shall be ready to hearken to any remedies that may
prevent

prevent it; and accordingly I shall propose two or three, which, by the blessing of God, may prove effectual.

The first remedy then which I shall propose is this, not to set an undue value upon this world's goods.

Now the worth of every thing is to be measured by its use; nor can any thing be useful any further than as it promotes our own, or another's good, or God's glory. If then we have but such a portion of this world's goods, as will answer all the ends which our station requires, we have all that is sufficient. And indeed, as far as ourselves alone are concerned, all that are supplied with the conveniencies and comforts of life, are much upon a level; for to enjoy life, is all that we can reasonably desire, and that in very moderate circumstances we may do, and in the most affluent we can do no more; for boundless as our fortunes may be, our appetites are stinted: so that if we will be but content with that happiness, which nature designed

signed us, we may be happy at a short and easy rate; but if we will aim at imaginary happiness, we may be for ever in search of what we shall be sure never to find. Not but that, consistently enough with what I am saying, we may wish, and lawfully endeavour too, to mend our condition, and to encrease our fortune, in order to enlarge our sphere of doing good; but then we are to observe withal, that whosoever should desire to better his station upon so generous a principle, would scorn to look with envy at another more amply furnished than himself; nor could he, with any reason, be uneasy in the mean time with his present allotment, as knowing that God, who needs not our actions to interpret our intentions, will esteem the will in this case for the deed; and reward us according to the largeness of our hearts, and not the narrowness of our circumstances.

A second remedy is, to possess ourselves with a due notion of God's providence. Let us remember, that the various distributions of
mankind

mankind are His; that He alone is the grand proprietor of the universe, and we but His servants and stewards, accountable for the improvement or neglect of those talents committed to our care; and that the larger our receipts are in this world, the more have we to answer for in the other: that He is infinitely wise and good, and therefore able and willing to dispose of us better than we can ourselves: that be our circumstances what they will, He can bestow his grace upon them, with which the meanest may be happy, and without which the greatest will be miserable; and this sure must pluck up envy by the roots. For what? shall I envy a man his wealth? which if either ill gotten, or not enjoyed, is not a blessing, but a curse; Or repine at the honours of another? which, if purchased at the expence of his conscience, do but render him more splendidly miserable; when, perhaps too, were I to be stated in the condition of either, I should but multiply my sins by the change. We see what a strange altera-

alteration ease and affluence often make in a man; and who then, except God himself, can tell, but that he, who is now virtuous and happy in industrious poverty, would surfeit upon the plenties of Providence, and grow as vicious and abandoned as the most profligate person living? In a word, let us bear in mind, that this life is a state of trial, and the next of retribution; and that, whatever therefore may be our lot here, we are sure, unless wanting to ourselves, of being infinitely and eternally happy hereafter.

The third and last remedy, which I would propose, is, that we should duly meditate on the doctrine and example of our Saviour, which, as they best show us the sinfulness of envy, so do they most powerfully enforce the practice of those virtues, which are most opposite to it.

Now the sum of the Gospel is briefly comprised in this, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour; that is, of all mankind; for the Gospel bids us look upon every man

as such, or in a yet closer tie still, even that of a brother. Love is called the perfection of the law, and it will turn chiefly upon this important article, whether we shall finally be admitted into heaven, or for ever be excluded from it. Love, as I said before, is made the distinguishing badge of a true disciple; and as it bears so eminent a place above most other virtues, 'tis no wonder if it should be honoured with peculiar privileges and rewards. In short, love it is which renders us most like to God, for *God is love*; and like Him we must be, or never expect to enjoy him.

But further to illustrate our Saviour's doctrine by his life, and that with a particular eye to the subject I am upon. Does our envy then spring from self-love? *i. e.* are we therefore envious and uncharitable against others, because inordinate lovers of ourselves? How contrary to this was our Saviour? who so loved mankind, as that he thought he could do nothing too much for their good; who, that he might purchase their redemption, was

resolved to bring even the Godhead and manhood together, rather than not to effect it. Or does it spring from pride and a vain opinion, that our merit is superior to that of others, so that the first place, the chief power and dignity must of right belong to us? Our Saviour, on the contrary, how meek and lowly? who, though of the same nature with God, yet condescended to take human nature upon Him, and appeared amongst us, not as man only, but as one of the meanest of men. Does it spring from worldly-mindedness and an inordinate desire of this world's goods, so that we cannot bear to see another possessed of those advantages which we want? How different from this was our Saviour, who had but the bare necessities of life, and was content? Or, lastly, does it spring from impatience and unthankfulness under God's appointments? How resigned, on the contrary, was our Lord's behaviour, when, in the severest of his agonies, he said, *Father, not my will, but thine be done?*

This

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This is the example which Christ hath set us; and if we will but endeavour our best to imitate it, we have the promise of His grace for our comfort here, and of His glory for our eternal reward hereafter: Privileges these, which must make all other advantages appear too mean to deserve envy; and which are least of all to be envied themselves, because they are what, (by God's blessing) every one, if he will, may enjoy.

T H E E N D.

